

Chapter Four: The Country at War

In the previous chapters, we focused on reconstructing and analyzing the political, diplomatic, and military events surrounding Italy's participation in World War II from 1940 to 1942 and their interaction with the Italian economic reality of those years. Just as we have deliberately treated these events as parallel as possible, given that a reconstruction of one without the other would remain superficial and wholly inadequate to make them historically intelligible, we have deliberately not dealt with, apart from a few brief references necessary to clarify particular issues, those that can be defined *broadly* as domestic politics, including many aspects of the economic life of those years that had a significant and growing impact on it, either directly or indirectly. As we shall now see, these events can only be understood historically if we have a clear understanding of the former and realize that it was the political, diplomatic, and military events that influenced domestic politics and not vice versa. This is true even though both were deeply affected by the basic reality and events of the national economy.

In lectures given at the Sorbonne in 1950, Federico Chabod made a statement that we feel is worth ^{quoting}:

The events of the war... only serve to widen, day by day, the deep chasm that has opened up between the country and Mussolini. Military preparations are nothing but a bluff: the soldiers are doing their duty very well, but they are poorly armed and poorly equipped... The people are beginning to ask themselves: 'Where is the military power that has been talked about so much? ... It is another bluff: the corporative state was a bluff, and so is military preparation'.

By 1939, consensus no longer existed: now even the prestige of the leader and the regime collapsed. Fascism would fall apart, like a machine whose springs had broken.

Chabod's historical stature leads us to exclude that the synthetic nature of the lectures, given moreover to a foreign audience less than five years after the end of the war, is sufficient to explain the contradiction that lies at the heart of this statement. Hence the need for two observations, one marginal and clarifying, the other substantive and introducing us immediately to the heart of the discussion on the 'internal front', that is, the attitude of Italians towards the war and, therefore, towards the fascist regime and Mussolini, who were responsible for Italy's participation in the war and its catastrophic consequences for the country.

The first observation concerns the process of widening the gap between the country and Mussolini: it was not as continuous and straightforward as Chabod's statement might suggest; rather, it proceeded in phases, stalls, and resumptions, largely connected to the progress of military operations (but not only to that, as we shall see), which, although they did not affect the final outcome, must nevertheless be understood in order to focus on both the country's attitude towards the war and its relationship with the fascist regime and Mussolini and, therefore, the margins (and internal conflicts) of their political action and, finally, the many outcomes that this attitude had after July 25 and even after April 1945. The second observation concerns an internal contradiction in Chabod's statement: on the one hand, it says that in 1939 consensus no longer existed, and on the other, that it was during the war and as a result of the discovery of the bluff of Italy's military preparation, asserted in words but denied by facts, that 'even the prestige of the leader and the regime' fell apart.

That the consensus enjoyed by the fascist regime had gone—despite the temporary surges caused by the "conquest of the empire" and the "peacemaking role" played by Mussolini during the Czechoslovak crisis of 1938 and the Munich Conference —declined after the peaks reached with the Conciliation and during the "great crisis" is a fact. It is also a fact that the alliance with Germany contributed significantly to its decline. However, it is impossible to assert that consensus no longer existed in 1939 and, even if we accept Chabod's assertion, it is necessary to explain why its collapse did not also affect Mussolini's prestige and even that of the regime, a collapse that only occurred during the war and with the discovery of the fascist military bluff. In our opinion, this contradiction can only be explained by two considerations. One is that, even when talking about

By "country" and "people," Chabod was essentially referring to the bourgeoisie, and in particular to that part of it that Salvatorelli had defined as "humanistic," which he saw as a unified entity.

but essentially unified, and practically projected its attitude towards Mussolini and the regime onto other social and "cultural" classes and groups. So much so—and this is our second observation—that, immediately afterwards to highlight the difference in the national climate between 1915-18 and 1940-43, he referred to the example of voluntary service, which came from the ranks of the bourgeoisie and, in his opinion, was much less significant in the Second World War than in the First, and to its Risorgimento tradition. This explains the origin of his contradiction. The 'Pact of Steel' and racial policy, as a negation of the Risorgimento tradition and the ethical and political ideals that underpinned it, could not fail to mark the end of consensus for Chabod. And in fact, for a part of the bourgeoisie, they did mark the end, as they did for a part of the Catholic world and especially for those less affected by the Risorgimento experience and, in their own way, more 'intransigent'. Despite this, when Italy entered the war, "soldiers and officers did their duty, fought with honor, even if poorly equipped and poorly armed; they wrote many heroic pages in the history of the country."² Since consensus no longer existed, the only explanation could be found in the Risorgimento patriotism still alive in the bourgeoisie. In that intimate "terrible travail" which - as Benedetto Croce said (with an excess of national *pietas* and, perhaps, to hearten the liberal bourgeoisie exposed to all sorts of accusations and concentric attacks) at the Bari congress of the Liberation Committees in January 1944 had led the bourgeoisie to "do its duty," to fight a war in which it did not believe and which it actually opposed (but which, until the last days of "non-belligerence," even a man like Croce thought "with illusions of hope and even confidence" that Italy could fight alongside France and England which shows that, despite everything, Mussolini and fascism still enjoyed a certain amount of confidence among the bourgeoisie), until it appeared not only ruinous but also a betrayal of their patriotic ideals:

Yet, with war declared and irrevocable, we experienced an even more terrible turmoil in our hearts; because a strict civic education had taught us the axiomatic principle that, when the first cannon shot is heard, a people must silence all its differences and unite in a single will for the defense and victory of the fatherland, which, whether right or wrong, is the fatherland. And we were reluctant to obey this solemn principle, and our reluctance was not that of rebellious passion, but of an inner voice, a sense of truth that made us feel that observance

of the ancient maxim would have been, this time, an impossible effort, a terrible hypocrisy towards ourselves. Little by little, the light dawned on us: we began to hear around us the opinion that the present war was not a war between peoples but a civil war; and more precisely, that it was not a simple war of political and economic interests, but a war of religion; and for our religion, which had the right to command us, we resigned ourselves to the painful detachment from the desire for an Italian victory, a victory that would have been not only the ruin of the rest of the world but also that of Italy, enslaved by Germany, [...] Thus, while carefully refraining from saying anything that might discourage our soldiers, while exhorting them, when they turned to us, eager to know our thoughts, to do only their military duty for their own dignity, to command the respect of their adversaries and to contribute, with this, which was the only means available to them, to a better future for Italy, we anxiously sought the formation of a better future for Italy, not in the military successes of the so-called "axis" (which, moreover, began to wane in the second year of the war and, for Italy, to fail altogether), but in the slow and laborious progress of England and then Russia and America.

This explanation clarifies the origin of the contradiction in Chabod's argument and also highlights a particular aspect of how the war was experienced by part of the Italian bourgeoisie; however, it does little to help us effectively understand the attitude of Italians towards the war, Mussolini, and the regime, and how the latter viewed and acted or attempted to act upon it. If we want to achieve this understanding, there are other paths to follow, just as there are more than one interpretative frameworks to set aside.

The first point to clarify is the weakness of explanations that, in one way or another, stem from an overestimation or undue expansion of the "Risorgimento tradition"; that is, a tradition that had never taken on national dimensions and that, in the period we are dealing with, was the heritage not only of a minority, but of a minority that had split into two factions that attributed different contents and values to it.

As early as the early 1960s, Vittorio de Caprariis warned ^{that}

The history of Italy in the twentieth century is not one of the continuation into the new century of the ethical and political ideals that had presided over the Risorgimento revolution, but rather one of their fading away. ... it is, in short, the story of the detachment from the Risorgimento, and therefore of the new that had been growing in the decades straddling the 19th and 20th centuries and which had, so to speak, forced that detachment.

In subsequent years, the issue was addressed by Rosario Romeo, who masterfully developed De Caprariis's argument from a number of perspectives. First of all, that of the deepening of the detachment from the tra-

Risorgimento edition as a result of the First World War and, above all, on the one hand, the expectation it aroused of a different social and political order based much more on the aspirations of 'red' and 'black' Italy

'red' and 'black' Italy than on the ideals of the 'tricolour' Italy, and, on the other hand, by the emergence in the latter of passions and convictions (such as the glorification of war and struggle and their significance in the history of peoples)

"which denounced a moral climate and a sentiment of life very different from that in which the liberal state had developed." Then there was the break in two of the Risorgimento tradition produced by fascism, which gradually deepened over the course of the twenty years and transformed during the war into open conflict between two concepts that had become antithetical and both now incapable of even partially upholding the cardinal principle on which the Risorgimento tradition was based: the inseparable unity of homeland and freedom. And finally, from the point of view of the transformation of the idea of nation into nationalism, which began in the 19th century and also reached its peak with the Second World War, affecting - albeit to varying degrees - all European countries, particularly those, including Italy, which had most recently achieved national unity through struggles, sacrifices, and unforgotten "renunciations," and in which the state had played a decisive role. Thus, in addition to taking on a whole series of tasks imposed on it by technical progress, economic development, and the growing presence in political life of masses that had previously been excluded, to the point of appearing and constituting the supreme and necessary synthesis of modern collective life, it had also taken on a series of emotional values, which in many cases had ended up erasing any real distinction between cultural nation and political nation. With the consequence that

In political life, all the moral and intellectual values that arose from within society were being overturned: thought, poetry, and culture, economic progress, and civil improvement were called to the service of the nation, and only in relation to it did they acquire meaning and value. Duty to the state and the nation was taking on, even in outward forms, characteristics that assumed the tone and patterns of religion, in a world where the place of traditional religions was largely declining.

In Italy, this process of transformation and exaggeration of the idea of nationhood did not reach the point of criminalizing the enemy, who was seen as a reprobate to be

countries. Nor did it arrive, all things considered, even with fascism: the exaltation and rhetoric of the state, the nation, and the new "mission" that would have fallen to Italy as heir to the greatness and civilizing function of ancient Rome did not reach, even in the midst of war, the extreme shores of

"a tendency towards the total annihilation of the enemy, who was even relegated by Nazism to a biologically inferior sphere and identified by the Allies as the cause of Evil and ^{Error}". Various factors contributed to preventing this, most of which had nothing to do with the tradition of the Risorgimento: on the one hand, the very character of Italians, who were both skeptical and tolerant: the influence of Catholicism, the fact that Italy had not experienced religious wars, and the persistence, conscious or not, even among fascists, of cultural and ethical motivations of a liberal nature; on the other hand, the fact that hostility towards the countries with which Italy found itself at war was based more on 'selfishness', their 'wealth' and 'insensitivity' towards the 'rights' of a 'poor' and demographically expanding people such as the Italians, rather than on a concrete past of struggles, bloodshed, and humiliation, which, if anything, characterized relations with the German ally much more; on the other hand, the particular perspective and political events that had led Mussolini into war and the equally particular nature of relations with Germany and, as a result, with other European countries and peoples, which necessarily derived from that perspective and those events. Significant in this regard is what Ugo Spirito wrote in his *Guerra rivoluzionaria (Revolutionary War)* in 1941:

What is missing... in this war is precisely the passion of the side, the clarity of love and hate for which one fights, the elevation of the enemy to a myth of evil. There have been too many sudden changes of friends and enemies and too many doubts about possible friends and enemies in recent years for us to be able to identify the friend with good and the enemy with evil without hesitation. On the other hand, we have become too cunning and too critical... not to understand that good and evil are not attributes of any particular people, just as no one in particular bears the true responsibility for war. These convictions now live deep in the conscience of each of us and are imposed on the propaganda organs themselves, which are increasingly forced to distinguish peoples from governments or regimes, nations from some

ne cliques or political forces operating within them. Nor, of course, should this be regretted as a negative aspect of our times, for it is precisely in this superior critical awareness that the premises for a better tomorrow are to be found... All the more so since the previous war taught us that the real winners are those who have the strength to win in the post-war period, that is, those who demonstrate constructive abilities that go beyond the relationship between winner and loser. And if today we must commit all our forces to victory, we must also be able to see the ideal of victory in something that goes beyond the war itself and be ready for a peace of sincere collaboration with our current enemy. Our voice, therefore, while it cannot fail to be the voice of a party that aspires to victory, wants to express the will of a party that desires to share in victory, that is, of those who want to win for themselves and for others, because only on this condition do they know they can truly win for themselves.

Saying this does not, of course, mean denying what remains one of the essential facts for understanding the attitude of Italians towards the war, Mussolini, and the regime. Namely, that even in Italy, the war tended to take on, and in part did take on, the character of a religious war fought with a previously unknown *animus* and in the name of ideologies and political models that transcended national borders (something that was not new and had precedents dating back to the French Revolution) and, more importantly, had little or nothing to do with previous patriotism and, even more so, with the way of considering loyalty and betrayal that had dominated when the nation was the supreme ethical and political principle. Significant for understanding the difference between this *animus* and the previous one is the debate on 'total war' that flared up in the early months of 1943 and affected various and diverse youth circles, with even figures who were anything but vulgar taking a stand in favor of 'total war'. However, it is necessary to make this clear, because in historical terms it must also be realized that nationalism in fascism and its conception of war had a different character and weight from that in other countries, especially Nazi Germany.

There is no doubt that nationalism was one of the most important components of fascism's ideology, culture, attitude towards life, and desire for affirmation and power. It is equally indisputable that fascism always leveraged nationalism, both because it was aware of its powerful emotional charge and therefore, its simplifying force, and because it served to devitalize and unify the different positions that characterized the bourgeoisie's attitude towards it and, above all, to accelerate the nationalization of the masses, that is, to integrate into the fascist state those social strata that

remained alien to the ^{liberal} state. However, this is not enough to conclude that nationalism was *tout court* the central element of fascism, nor that there were no significant differences between the nationalism of fascism and other forms of nationalism. For if, on the one hand, fascism made full use of nationalism to gain more support and, once at war, to mobilize the masses as much as possible, on the other hand, at the level of the intellectual and political elites and in anticipation of the problems that Italy would face after victory, it considered the problem of the nation to be outdated and questioned nationalism itself.

From a fascist perspective, the nation had been the central problem of the 19th century, which had been resolved in accordance with the ethical and political requirements of the time: in the 20th century, European civilization and, therefore, fascism had other, more important problems to address and resolve, *primarily that of the state and authority*. Nevertheless, the outbreak of World War II and, even more so, Italy's intervention (with the problems it entailed, primarily those of the future relationship between Germany and Italy) set in motion a vast debate which, while focusing on the future 'new order', often took on the character of a rethinking of the problem of the nation and nationalism seen from the perspective of the various 'souls', interests, and strategies of fascism.

The nation bore the brunt of this rethinking. In fact, almost everyone questioned it, from moderate conservatives to the champions of the "new civilization." The criticism of the former, who were both fascinated and frightened by German theory and policy on "living space," was directed against the principle of nationality, above all because

- , as Francesco Orestano wrote, even before Italy's intervention,
 - inapplicable to multinational and multilingual regions and because it favored the emergence of what we now call micronationalism, thus threatening to become a disruptive force in a Europe that should instead have sought to balance national and economic factors in
- "broader, richer, more capable of finding common ground and developing partnerships." The views of the latter (scattered across a wider range of positions, which in various cases referred directly or indirectly to ideas and initiatives from the first half of the ^{the} previous decade) tended in a completely different direction. For them, atomism

of individual nationalities and the conflicts between nations could only be resolved on the basis of a common European consciousness, an essential prerequisite for a new Europe in which Italy could and should fulfill its "mission" and its civil and moral "primacy," thus constituting a counterweight to Germany's plans for political and economic hegemony.

At the root of these positions there was certainly a great deal of ideology, a great deal of

instrumentalism and also a good dose of demagoguery; the fact remains, however, that for many fascist intellectuals, the nation state was now a reality in the process of being superseded. The same cannot be said for nationalism, which was essentially the driving force behind the moderate conservatives' criticism of the nation and was one of the very few "values" with which the old fascism—disappointed in its most vivid aspirations and ambitions, increasingly sidelined in favor of those expressed by younger generations, and convinced that it could regain *its* lost ideal and political leadership through war—most identified and which—as already mentioned—was above all an instrument of national cohesion that not only the regime but also the vast majority of those same fascists, who considered it an obstacle to the formation of a superior Euro-fascist consciousness or who sometimes saw it as a politically counterproductive element, could not renounce at that moment and, indeed, had to keep alive and support. That said, the fact remains that this nationalism, while no longer having anything in common with the old patriotism (which had almost disappeared at the mass level and was still alive only in restricted circles of the intellectual bourgeoisie, for whom it often constituted a family tradition), and despite participating in some respects in the ideologization of the ongoing struggle, it remained throughout the conflict at a lower level of exasperation than other forms of nationalism, and where it reached its highest peaks, it was not at the popular level, but in the more politicized bourgeois and youth circles. Hence the need, in historical terms, to take it fully into account, but not to overestimate its impact on the attitude of Italians in general and the masses in particular towards the war, Mussolini, and the regime.

To understand this attitude, it is much more useful to break it down and reconstruct it in its various components and social and cultural manifestations, while always keeping in mind both the degree of development and modernization of Italian society at the time and the evolution of the political, military, and economic situation during the war from two perspectives

a) the direct and immediate repercussions (not always or entirely in the same direction) that it had in various circles, and *b*) certain constants which, on the other hand, were a consequence of the nature and history of the regime, but which also had a considerable influence on the attitude of Italians during the war.

On this last point, it should be emphasized that the ^{delegitimizing} effect that the war had on the regime and on Mussolini's image, while largely dependent on the events of the war and their repercussions on the country's living conditions, it cannot be assessed without taking into account the fact that the process of delegitimization had already begun before Italy entered the war and was reinforced by factors that interacted with those, partially different, determined by the war. It is precisely the nature (together with the dynamics) of this progressive delegitimization that must be focused on, because only in this way is it possible to reconstruct in effectively historical terms both the crisis and fall of the regime and the events of the following two years; other explanations, starting with the one based on the "decisive" contribution of anti-fascism, make a correct reconstruction impossible.

As we will see later, the resumption of anti-fascist activity was delayed. (practically following the Allied landing in French North Africa) and, in the period that interests us here, that is, until July 25, 1943, it was very limited, confined to particular circles and groups with few ties to the country. Outside these circles and groups, largely made up of long-standing opponents who had been more or less dormant until then, the development of anti-fascism encountered not only and not so much the objective obstacle represented by the vigilance and preventive repression of the police apparatus, but also and above all the obstacle - which brings us back to the question of legitimacy - that, for better or worse, the regime had obtained in various forms in most of the country, even in the part that had not adhered to it *wholeheartedly*, and the progressive process of its disintegration - consisting of the fact that, after twenty years of fascist power, it presented itself as an anti-establishment force, psychologically alien to the majority of Italians, who identified it essentially with the pre-fascist parties (on which, due to the experience of the mistakes they had made and the defeat they had suffered, due to ignorance, due to the effect of fascist propaganda and mass culture, a very often unfavorable or even negative judgment weighed) and which was driven by two essentially still pre-political states of mind. The well-rooted one, which took the form of a growing desire for the war to end, or

never completely lost, ended and that, very confused, but also very much alive, of a "change," which, however, was conceived more as a change of the incompetent and corrupt men responsible for the tragedy in which Italy found itself and as a dismantling of a series of aspects of the regime and its political presence in the country than as a total destruction of the system, which, despite everything, was recognized as having many merits and could not be countered with other concrete models. So much so that it was only after July 25 and especially after September 8 that the fall of the sovereign's image, the sacrifice and dissolution of the army with all the problems of survival that ensued for the disbanded military, the brutality of the German occupation, the reconstitution of a fascist government linked to Germany, and the first episodes of civil war effectively marked the beginning of the mass politicization of Italians and anti-fascism as a real force. It was then, to put it in terms of social psychology, that awareness of the causes of fascism and the national tragedy it had caused prevailed over frustration and old norms of behavior, and with it new values began to emerge.

It should also be emphasized that the process of delegitimization does not remained confined only to the masses and to more or less *routine* fascism and its supporters, but also affected the most convinced and uncompromising: faced with the incompetence, corruption, and parasitism of large sections of the ruling class, or rather their insensitivity and inertia in crushing them, a large part of it—the "hardliners" who, not surprisingly, would constitute one of the most important souls of the RSI—on the one hand, they took an increasingly critical attitude towards the regime and even more so towards a series of its exponents judged (rightly or wrongly, it does not matter to us at this point) to be the main culprits of the 'degeneration' of the regime and therefore of its defeats and, on the other hand, they began to wave ever more insistently (and not only in words) for a return to the origins of fascism and its 'genuine ideals' and for a regeneration of the regime that would enable it to achieve an effective 'mass mobilization' of all the energies and resources existing in the country and a 'totalitarian' conduct of the war; all to be pursued and achieved through the use of drastic, uncompromising, and even ruthless means. Only Mussolini was spared this delegitimization of the regime and its *elite*, and even then only partially. This was partly due to the personal prestige he still enjoyed, despite everything, among the most uncompromising fascists, both old and young; partly because they realized how dangerous it would be at that moment to further weaken his already limited prestige and authority in the country; but also partly because in a society

Still largely unmodernized compared to Italy, moral judgments on personal honesty or corruption carried considerable weight, greater than that of many other types of judgments and assessments. Mussolini could be criticized for his mistakes, his incompetence, his excessive weakness towards people and situations (and above all towards his son-in-law, who embodied everything that the hardliners condemned most and whom they saw as one of the main causes of the regime's degeneration) and attributed with countless responsibilities, but no criticism could be made of his personal morality and correctness in the financial management of the state, and in particular no accusations of illicit enrichment. This explains why his image was less affected by the process of progressive delegitimization that the regime underwent during the war in the eyes of the "hardline" fascists, and helps to understand how, at least initially, the image of Mussolini and that of the regime were, despite everything, partially different, even for significant sectors of the country. This was often the case for the working classes, who saw him as a human being, a nature somewhat more similar to their own nature and morality, and more sympathetic to their problems than the vast majority of the hierarchy, so that they were more inclined to believe that he was unaware of many things and was being deceived by his collaborators. It is not without significance in this regard that even in 1941, in some of the poorest and most backward agricultural areas, there were popular demonstrations, especially by women, against the high cost of living, the *am-massi*, the closure of small mills for processing grain for local use, during which the intervention of the 'Duce' was invoked to put an end to the abuses, injustices, and inefficiency of local state and party officials, hoarders, and the rich. For one thing must be understood—however difficult it may be—if we truly want to understand what Mussolini meant to the majority of Italians for so many years and, therefore, why his prestige, although gradually declining, suffered less than is commonly thought from the process of delegitimization that completely wore down the regime during the war years. This is something that only Carlo Arturo Jemolo had the courage to state in no uncertain terms:

Looking back with disillusioned eyes, incapable of that art, which I see so widely practiced, of reconstructing history as we would like it to have been, having always reacted to the history written by the victors, I remain of the opinion that Mussolini, due to the breadth of his support and the depth of affection for him, was loved in a way that neither Garibaldi nor

Baldi nor Mazzini. And I firmly reject the legend of a Mussolini who was loved only by the rich and the bourgeoisie; anyone who remembers the delirium of the working masses for him, the hysterical outbursts of the women of the people, anyone who remembers the many humble, the many poor, who swore by the Duce, who trembled for him at the news of an assassination attempt, cannot subscribe to this legend.

In the concluding pages of the previous volume, we already had occasion to mention how, in the second half of May 1940, the attitude of Italians towards the possibility of entering the war changed within a few days. From widespread hostility to war, and especially to a war alongside Germany against France and England (which for many remained, despite everything, the Allies of 1915-18), there had been a shift to a sort of acceptance of the inevitability and, for many, even the opportunity, convenience, and necessity of intervention. This change was brought about by Germany's grandiose and unexpected victories in France. The collapse of the Maginot Line, the failure of the 'second Marne', which many had taken for granted, and Dunkirk had led many who, until a few weeks earlier, had been advocates of an *indefinite* extension of 'non-belligerence' and even of intervention alongside France and England, to believe that Germany had now won, that the war was about to end and that, at this point, Italy should also enter the war: if it did not, not only would it confirm its reputation as an unreliable and treacherous ally, but it would leave Hitler as the sole arbiter of the reorganization of Europe according to Germany's interests alone and would gain nothing from the defeat of the Franco-British forces. On this last point, it cannot be ignored that even many who until the first half of May had been opposed to the war, privately considered many of the national claims put forward by fascism to be well-founded: almost two decades of fascism, during which for the vast majority there had been only fascist propaganda and culture, which, moreover, often found endorsement in a previous national culture steeped in memories and sentiments of the Risorgimento and post-Risorgimento frustrations, had in fact produced effects that it would be wrong to underestimate.

The fact that the declaration of war was met with less enthusiasm than in May 1915, that the people listening to Mussolini's announcement in Piazza Venezia and other squares throughout Italy generally reacted with less excitement than on other occasions, and that extensive documentation attests to the fact that the intervention was experienced, even by many who approved of it, with a sort of confused sense of concern and

Shame¹ should not be misleading. The truth is that France's vertical collapse and the prospect of a very short and victorious war (and "victory is never bitter"²) silenced much of the mistrust and hostility towards Germany and brought to the surface other, less ancient but no less real, feelings towards France and especially England, giving breath to a never-dormant "national realism" that infected and deluded many. To the point, as Amendola wrote of sowing discouragement, confusion, and division even among the ranks of the small anti-fascist groups present in the country, which were already in a difficult situation in the face of war: the liberal democrats because of the conflict of conscience—so well remembered by Croce—arising from the contrast between their ideals of freedom and "the homeland at war," and the communists because of the conflict between their ideals and their faith in the "homeland of socialism" and its collaboration with the Axis. It is more realistic, albeit sad, to say that, rather than through the door of drama—as had been the case in 1915 for a large section of the ruling class and the bourgeoisie *tout court*—through the door of the reaffirmation and realization of a series of ethical and political values, not least the need for a "maturity test" for the nation - in 1940, the Italian ruling class and bourgeoisie entered the new conflict through the door of a sort of *game* considered easy, profitable, and necessary. For the vast majority of the Italian middle classes, the awareness that they would probably have to face a tragedy would only come later. The same can be said for the 'sense of war', for the moral commitment that so many Italians, even non-fascists or increasingly less fascist, put into it despite everything: only later did the war, which began as a sort of game, truly become war, 'something, as Croce had already glimpsed a quarter of a century earlier that a thousand reasons and incitements do not produce, but which, suddenly, no one knows how, produces itself, invades the soul and the body, increases its strength a hundredfold and directs it, and justifies itself, by the mere fact that it is and acts'.

The attitude of the working classes was not radically different. This was partly due to the skillful orchestration of propaganda, and partly because the trial partly due to the skillful orchestration of propaganda, partly because the process

The nationalization of the masses, especially among the younger age groups, had meanwhile made considerable progress. Mindful of what the war of 1915-18 had meant for them (and the peasants more than the workers, because they had suffered more and were more attached to certain traditional Christian values), they never considered war, even at that very early stage, to be a necessity or a kind of game. For the peasants, given their still predominant mentality, war very often appeared to be something very similar to one of the recurring natural disasters to which they were exposed and which could not be avoided, but only faced with resignation and virility. And this, above all, not having as its objective the conquest of inaccessible regions already inhabited by other Italians, but of overseas lands to be colonized, could perhaps bring them some benefit (this applies above all to the poorest southern plebs, among whom the myth of Africa predated fascism). And, if we put aside the labor rhetoric that has polluted so much of recent historiography and do not allow ourselves to be influenced by a few episodes of renewed contact and attempted proselytism by a few die-hard communist and socialist militants, which in practice have no value other than to testify to a commitment, a personal faith, we must agree that the workers not only did not constitute a force of opposition, but were also affected to some extent by the atmosphere in the country: although the vast majority were not in favor of the war, they deluded themselves into thinking that they too could benefit from it. This was all the more so because, on the one hand, they were unaware of what modern warfare was like and how it could massively reduce the distinction between the combat front and the home front, and on the other hand, they felt confident that they would not have to fight in it: since they had to take care of production, it would be mainly the peasants and the bourgeoisie who would do so, as in 1915-18 and even more so.

The only ones who could theoretically have contained the landslide towards intervention and give large sectors of the country a real awareness of the gravity of the ordeal that Italy would have to face were the Church and, more generally, Catholics, who during the "non-belligerence" had generally shown themselves to be opposed to participation in the conflict. In practice, however, this force also failed, proving to be much less homogeneous than one might think, disjointed by multiple positions, largely conditioned by and participating in the cultural and political climate of the country.

Especially among the lower clergy in rural areas, there were undoubtedly priests who were opposed to the war and even had anti-fascist sentiments.

Ecclesiastical "dissent" was also reconstructed using documentation and police reports. This was certainly a valuable source, but on closer inspection, it was almost always inclined to judge the clergy's positions on the basis of individual statements rather than seeing them in the context of the overall discourse in which they were expressed and from the perspective of ^{Christian} doctrine. therefore, to consider positions (generally sermons, pastoral letters, articles in parish bulletins) that in more political and culturally qualified forums were often not considered as such or were judged less serious and, in themselves, not indicative of an attitude of opposition. This sort of map reveals a reality that, while undoubtedly alarming to various sectors and organs of the regime and to Mussolini himself, nevertheless already suggests what in June 1940 and even later was one of the reasons for the lack of incisiveness of Catholic dissent, namely the deep division that existed in the Italian Catholic world regarding the war and the regime, and allows us to understand how, in political circles, it was considered less dangerous than it had been in 1915-18 and not such as to warrant measures that would have made relations with the Holy See difficult and could have led to a break with the Church. considered it less dangerous than that of 1915-18 and not such as to warrant measures that would have made relations with the Holy See difficult and could have led to a conflict with it. Significant in this regard is what Attolico (then ambassador

at the Holy See) wrote in a memo dated March 22, 1941, for internal use by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

The general attitude of the clergy in Italy, especially when compared to that of the past war, is not so serious as to represent a real situation of conflict. The seizure of a *dozen* weekly parish newsletters, made necessary by the absence of preventive censorship, shows, if we consider that the total number of *parishes* is about 27,000 (*o*), that discord is the exception rather than the rule.

According to the map reconstructed by Malgeri², in 1940-41 the attitude of the clergy was characterized, in the opinion of the police, above all by the "performance of strictly limited tasks in the religious and spiritual field" (63.4 percent of provinces) with peaks of pacifism and pietism (10 provinces) and even a lack of sympathy for the war and the regime (18 provinces). Only in 36.6 percent of the provinces did the clergy have a more "correct" attitude, with peaks of patriotism and support for the regime, even though in eleven of them there had been some "negative" episodes. Contrary to what one might think, in 1942 the situation had not worsened and, on the contrary, there was 'greater willingness to collaborate and feelings of patriotism', as a result of which the provinces that were in some way "dissident" had fallen to 57.4 percent and those in which the clergy had a more "correct" and even patriotic attitude and support for the regime had risen to 42.6 percent.

This greater "availability" adds another element to the picture we are trying to paint; in particular, it suggests that the gap between principled dissent—religious and spiritual—towards the war and national sentiment was not only less profound than the police believed, but also quite relative, since, as the burden of war increased, instead of becoming more radical, it began to resolve itself in favor of national sentiment. A closer examination of the documentation shows that the dissenting voices came mainly from the lower clergy and very few from bishops, even from minor dioceses, and from prelates of a certain importance, the vast majority of whom immediately assumed a strongly loyalist and patriotic attitude, often with very explicit demonstrations. One example among many is the exhortation that the bishop of Nocera and Gualdo, Monsignor Franciolini, addressed to the faithful of his diocese in his pastoral letter "Doveri dell'ora presente" (Duties of the Present Hour), on the occasion of Italy's entry into the war:

Obedience and discipline in the prompt, willing, and complete execution of the rules issued by the competent legitimate authorities. Banish rash rumors,

criticism and useless recriminations that only result in harmful consequences; but everyone, worthy of their place assigned by obedience and circumstances, should behave in a disciplined, serene, and generous manner, which nourishes and multiplies harmony at a time when this is the supreme duty for all.

Not to mention the military chaplains, who also came largely from the lower clergy and who, throughout the war, were the spearhead of the most ^{fervent} Catholic patriotism (and sometimes nationalism and fascism).

The central point to be made clear, however, does not concern the attitude of the clergy, which, in the final analysis, depended largely on that of the Holy See, and this—once the principle was established that dogmatic truths and the fundamental precepts of Christian morality "are immutable and perpetually and universally in force, even through the most changeable circumstances of time and place" and, therefore, the state of war could not "be sufficient reason for the Church, the repository and teacher of revealed doctrine, to shroud in silence a fundamental precept of Christianity" such as that of universal charity². Nor could it fail to take into account the echoes and repercussions that its attitude had both within the Italian Catholic world and on its relations with the regime and on the latter's policy towards Catholic organizations as a whole, and in the first place towards the most important and most unpopular with fascism, Catholic Action, precisely when the last remnants of the conflict that had affected it had been settled with an exchange of secret notes (on the rules governing the use of the association's badge) less than a month and a half before the declaration of war. This was all the more so given that, since the early months of the conflict, the Holy See had found itself in a

certain sense between two fires: that of fascist intransigence—which enjoyed the backing of PNF secretary Ettore Muti (according to ^{Ciano}¹, "a crude anticlerical" who wanted to "set fire to the priest's house") and had his battering ram in Farinacci's "Il regime fascista" (The Fascist Regime) - which wanted to silence any voice not only of dissent but also of "pietism" and force the Holy See to march in step with ^{the regime}² - a n d that of a series of institutions a n d organs of the regime which, in essence, had the same objective but, more realistically, sought to achieve it by soft means, even thinking of enhancing - as Attolico suggested - the Catholic Action that Pius XII held so dear, while at the same time giving it an "openly national" character.

, or rather, to making concessions that were particularly dear to the Holy See. Typical in this sense are the measures taken in 1941-42 to exempt Vatican capital from having to comply with the new rules on the nominative nature of securities and the related tax on their proceeds (on the grounds that the capital in question would thus certainly be used in Italy) and to establish the bodies that would enjoy the exemption

Historically, the main point of reference for understanding the action of the bishops

of the Bishops. This would allow for widespread action, since, due to the very nature of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, parish priests themselves would be required to collaborate with the Bishops in this area as well.

- 2) At the head of Italian Catholic Action is a commission of three cardinals chaired by Cardinal Lavitrano, Archbishop of Palermo. For national purposes, this commission could assume the role that, in other countries, is held by the Cardinal Primate, for example.
- 3) This would essentially resolve the issue of the ACI, which would thus take on an openly national character.

The article in *Il Nuovo Cittadino* mentioned above gave me the opportunity to emphasize the pressure in this regard and to return to the subject this morning with the Cardinal Secretary of State himself, to whom Comm. Babuscio Rizzo—who saw him for other reasons—showed the article in question. I would like to point out that Cardinal Maglione was *visibly surprised and disappointed by the publication*. It was therefore easy for the Councilor to refer again to the more general problem of greater collaboration by the Italian clergy, especially at this time, in the life of the nation.

Cardinal Maglione would not, I repeat, be averse to pursuing the idea in question and, while maintaining the necessary discretion on the subject, he is not opposed to giving the aforementioned Association a national dimension.

Something in this direction would therefore seem possible.

However, before encouraging the Holy See to develop this idea, I would ask to be informed whether a new orientation that would be given to the ACI and that would give the Association a national and patriotic character would be welcome at the highest level.

And I believe that we now have the opportunity to definitively bring Catholic Action into line, exercising through it, over the approximately 25,000 Italian parish priests, the action that we believe most appropriate for national purposes" (ASMAE, *Political Affairs, Holy See*, b. 52, 1941, phase. "Catholic Action").

Based on the available documentation, it is highly probable that the idea was dropped at Mussolini's behest. Apart from his fundamental hostility towards Catholic Action, the "Duce" was particularly irritated during those weeks, as Ciano told both

The attitude of Catholics cannot be determined by the attitude of the clergy. At most, this can help us understand the feelings and aspirations of the rural Catholic world, which in the period we are dealing with, however, only partially and increasingly less corresponded to the actual reality of Italian Catholicism, which was now largely concentrated in medium and large cities and was, on the one hand, more than entrusted, as in the past, to the care of the local clergy, organized, homogenized and 'modernized' by Catholic Action, and, on the other hand, differentiated internally into a very articulated range of positions, often very different and distant from each other, and which were greatly affected by the events of the war and the moods and more general orientations that these directly and indirectly determined in the country. Hence what Renato Moro (to whom we owe the best contribution to an effective historical understanding of the Catholic reality during the war) defined as 'the undulating line' of the Catholic attitude: It is right and necessary to reconstruct the various phases of this undulating line and to highlight the motivations that were more specific to the Catholic world and connected to the attitude of both the Vatican and the regime, but which, all things considered, do not appear, on closer inspection, to be very different from those that characterized the evolution of the overall attitude of the country at its various social and cultural levels. Hence, once again, there is a clear differentiation between the attitude of the working class and, above all, the peasantry, with its secular and spontaneous pacifism, its protest against the sacrifices imposed by the war, 'a protest that is not specifically Catholic' even if 'it is gathered through the traditional channels of the ecclesiastical institution' and 'is expressed in the religiosity of the less educated classes', and the attitude of the small and medium urban middle classes. "in which the appeal to discipline and responsibility towards the homeland plays a decisive role."

responsibility towards the homeland"². And, indeed, to a greater extent than it did in the secular bourgeoisie. For while the Catholic bourgeoisie shared almost all the myths and sentiments of the latter—beginning with those that determined its sudden conversion in May 1940 to intervention—it added to them its own concern to shake off

the "original sin" of Catholic opposition to the state, of not presenting itself as a moderate and conservative force and of not blending in with the

anti-fascist "subversives."¹ So, in conclusion, if we really want to understand and evaluate the attitude of Catholics, the only way, in our opinion, is not to do so in a uniform manner, but, as for the rest of the country, in relation to the various moments of the war and the various positions they expressed: the Holy See, the bishops, the clergy, the militant laity (and to a large extent the organizations in which it was articulated, Catholic Action, the Graduate Movement, the FUCI, etc.), Catholic culture (in its various expressions), the peasant masses represented spheres that could have points of intersection and even overlap, but which remained distinct and different overall and which, therefore, can be understood in their dynamics much more by referring to them to the common national political and social denominators than to the overly generic one of the 'Catholic world'.

In June 1943, Monsignor Bartolomasi, the military chaplain, in a circular letter to military chaplains dedicated to the need to keep "the morale of soldiers and even more so of ^{citizens}" higher than ever,² observed:

It seems strange, but it is very true that the morale of soldiers in operational areas is higher than that of soldiers in areas where there is no fighting, and higher among soldiers than among citizens.

Even taking into account the particular circumstances at the time it was made—when Italian cities had been subjected to heavy aerial bombardment for months and supplies were scarce in most of the country, following the workers' strikes in March-April and on the eve of the regime's collapse—the observation has a value and a basis of truth that go beyond that particular moment and can serve as a starting point for reconstructing how the war was experienced in 1940-43 by the various components of Italian society from the perspective of both the so-called 'internal front'

In this context, the Nazis could be seen as the "black angels," as the new barbarians bringing an anti-individualistic and totalitarian civilization, perhaps dangerous from a Christian point of view, but one that certainly had the future on its side and which Catholics had a duty to "participate" in and Christianize. Nor were there any lack of more strictly political considerations in the summer of 1940 to indicate that the "new Europe" of the Axis, alongside the danger of German domination, held the definite hope of a resurgent hegemony, following in the wake of Mussolini's victorious Italy, of a "bloc" of countries that were now openly Catholic, such as France, Spain, Portugal, and Hungary. If Belgium and Holland, which were being "reconstituted," had been added to these, along with the increased numerical and therefore political weight of Catholics in the Reich itself, which now included Poles and Alsatians in addition to Austrians and Czechoslovakians, the European picture would have undergone a profound evolution. Could Providence not have paved the way here too for a "new Europe" united under the

no," both of the combatants and of what the regime and Mussolini did to keep the Italians under control and their *spirits* high. Because if it is true that Mussolini - as we have already said - was convinced that any war, even if it was never "popular" at the beginning, would become so if it went well (or would become "very unpopular" if it went badly), so that what really mattered was its final outcome and not the 'psychological fluctuations' caused by the ups and downs of particular events of the war, it is also true that the 'Duce' was well aware of the importance that a series of other factors, especially in relation to the state of mind of the 'home front' and the combatants themselves, always had, especially when operations were going badly - and in this case they were the most numerous. a series of other factors, starting with the living conditions that the government was able to ensure for the country and, first and foremost, for the classes that were, on the one hand, poorer and lacking the means to supplement their now insufficient incomes and, on the other hand, less sensitive to the appeal of those values, suggestions, and myths that in other cases made certain sacrifices more bearable. Hence his following this aspect of the war with particular attention through all possible sources of information, from the most official and technical ones of the relevant ministries to those of the party, the trade unions, popular culture, from the various police forces and services responsible for postal censorship and telephone tapping to his own personal sources, the result of news and even just hints gathered during conversations with various personalities and talking to family members, officials, drivers from his secretariat, etc.; and, therefore, his direct intervention in the matter, sometimes (in moments of greatest difficulty or when he was most irritated by some particular piece of news) with peremptory orders that were completely useless or unachievable in those particular circumstances, which - as usual - only created difficulties and wasted the time and energy of those who had to put them into practice, often arousing irritation and discontent and even bringing ridicule upon the regime and him personally.

Nor was this concern unjustified. In fact, until the end of 1942, when the war took a clearly irreversible turn that set in motion a series of reactions at all levels, the problem most felt by the

The majority of Italians—apart from their obvious concern for family members in the military and their grief and regret for the dead (although it must be said that the fact that their numbers were significantly lower than in 1915-18 meant that many had, at least initially, a less dramatic image of the war¹)—were concerned about living conditions: the events of the war could, in Mussolini's words, cause "psychological fluctuations," even strongly negative ones (as was the case with the attack on Greece), but - as far as the majority of Italians were concerned - they had less of an impact on daily life than the increase in the cost of living and the ever-decreasing ability of fixed-income workers to cope with this increase, less than the shortage of food and basic necessities, even those subject to rationing, and even less than the

¹ To date, there are no precise figures available for losses during World War II. According to data from the Historical Office of the Italian Army, from June 1, 1940, to September 8, 1943, the army suffered 132,912 deaths, 115,000 wounded, and 129,675 missing. In 1915-18, there were 680,000 dead and wounded.

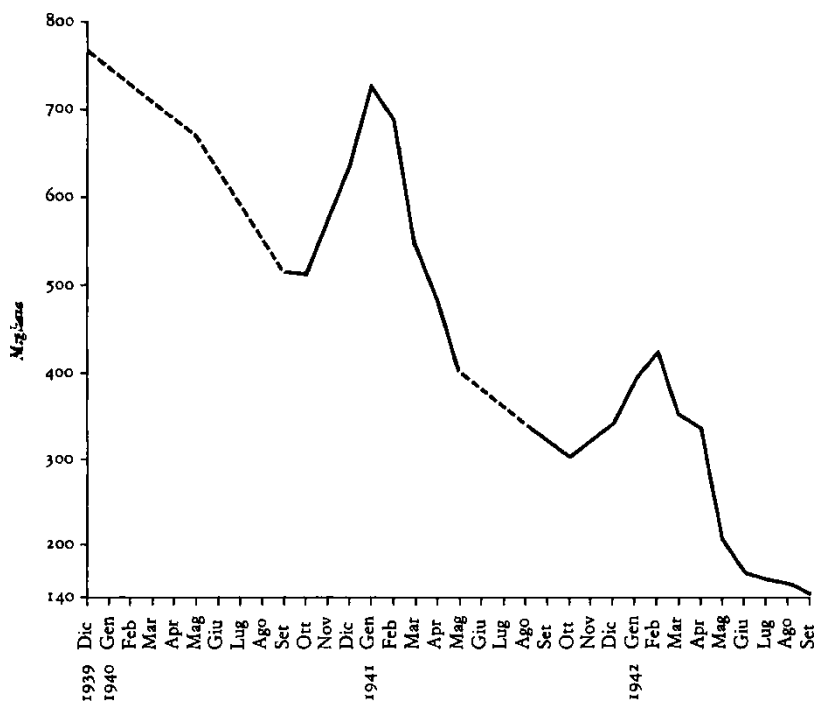
1,050,000. See AUSSME, Rep. L. io, Racc. 99, phase. 4. Figures partially different in ISTAT, *Dead and missing due to war causes in the years 1940-45*, Rome 1957, where data are provided by branch of service and rank and by front, as well as data relating to civilian casualties.

² Rationing of basic necessities was introduced with considerable delay (partly due to the belief that the war would soon be over, and partly due to a lack of real technical preparation) and amid underground controversy, particularly from the National Fascist Party, which favored strict control of prices and consumption by its central and peripheral bodies. Initially, the use of coffee (entirely imported and whose stocks were reserved for the armed forces) was banned, and rationing was applied to sugar, soap, edible fats, flour, pasta, and rice. Restrictions were subsequently introduced on the sale of other goods, meat, legumes, oil, and cheese. The first difficulties in rationing bread cereals arose in March 1941 and worsened in May (especially for supplies to Naples, Puglia, and Sicily). A study was finally prepared on the food situation and the need to introduce more systematic rationing. Although sent to Mussolini at the end of May, this study only became law at the end of September, when the Council of Ministers approved bread rationing. Mussolini, who personally presented the measure in conjunction with the one on the nominative nature of securities (the approval of which was, however, postponed to another session due to objections raised by various ministers, including Ciano, Grandi, and Gorla), justified it as follows: (s)

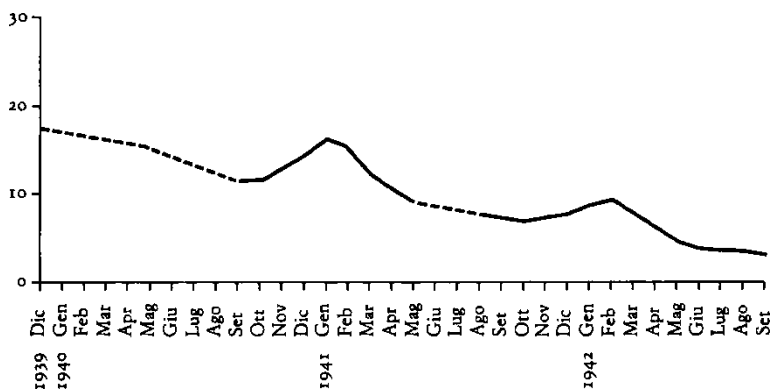
"The time has come to take a serious measure: the rationing of bread. It is a measure that is destined to have a profound impact on the entire population, but it has now become necessary, indeed unavoidable, so I have decided to adopt it, taking upon myself all the responsibilities that may arise from it. It will come into force

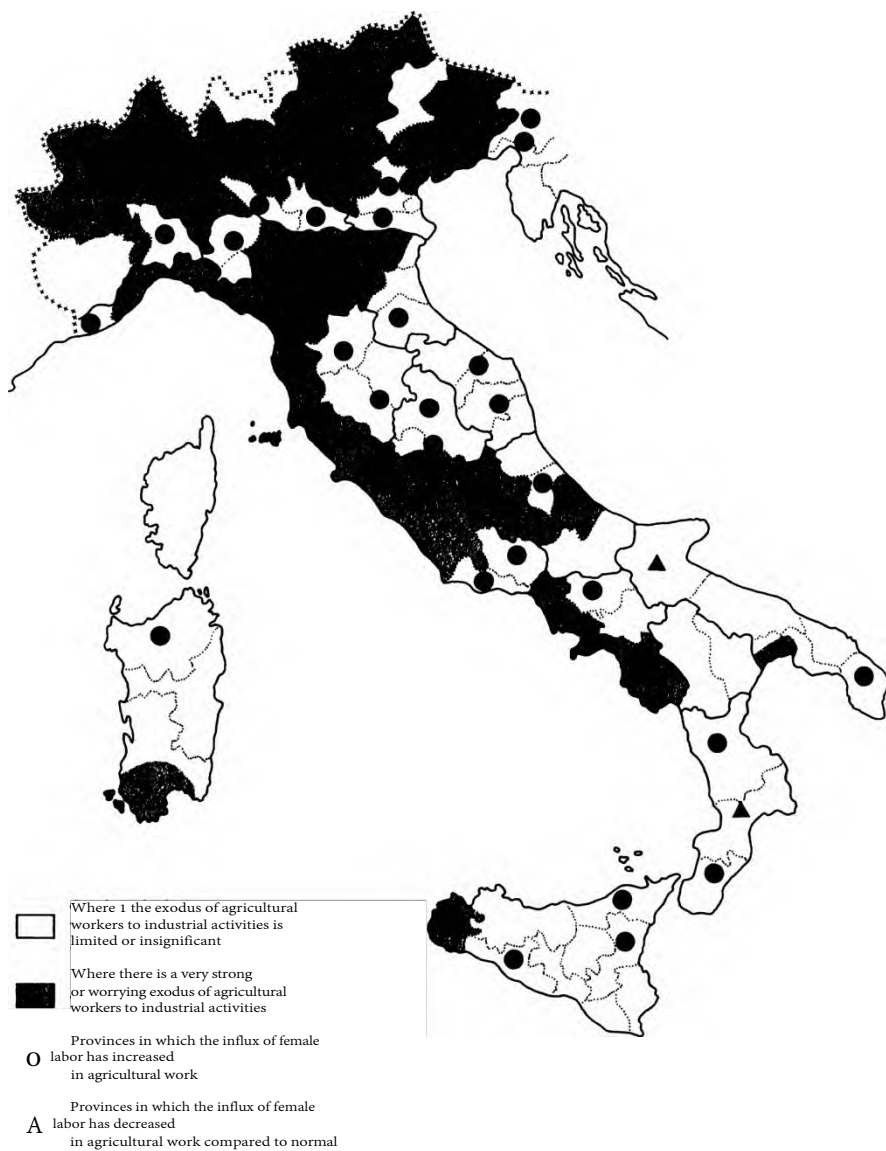
Unemployment trends 1940-42.

a) In absolute terms.

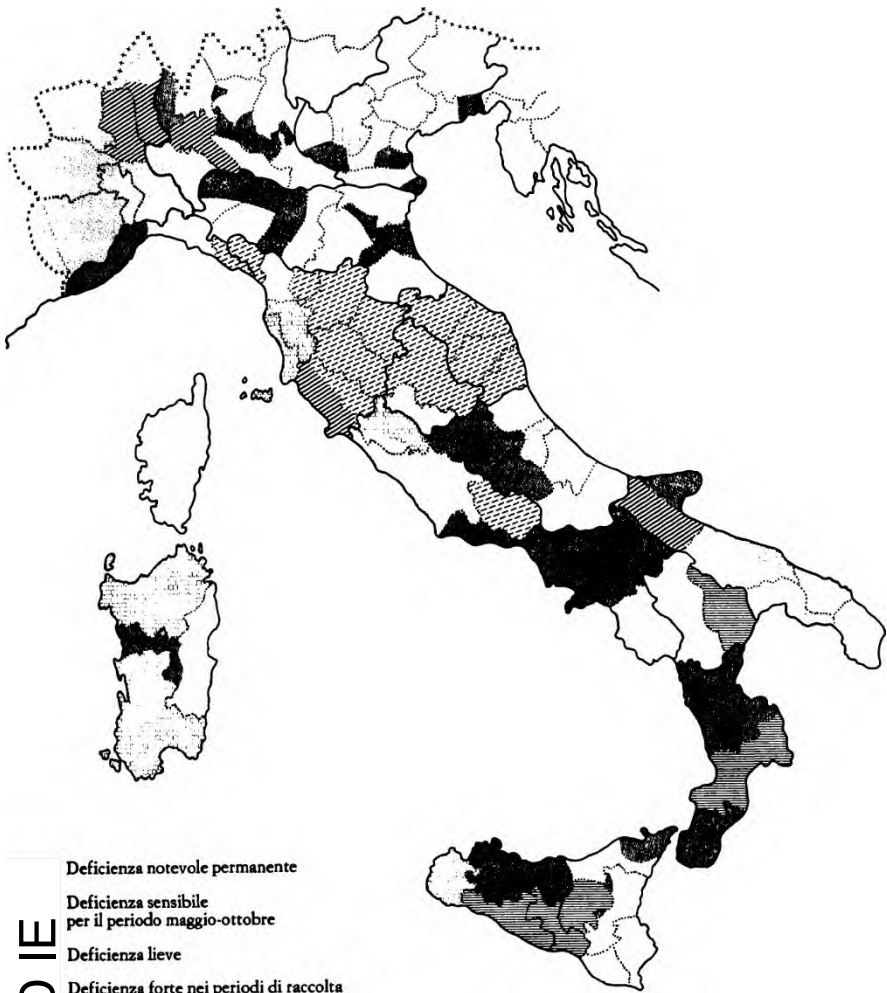


b) Compared to the population (per 1,000 inhabitants).





Exodus of agricultural workers to industrial activities and influx of female labor into agricultural work.



Deficienza notevole permanente

**Deficienza sensibile
per il periodo maggio-ottobre**

Deficienza lieve

Deficienza forte nei periodi di raccolta

Shortage of male members in
farming families

Shortage during peak periods

Where considered sufficient
the local workforce is considered sufficient

Ratio between availability and demand for agricultural labor in the 1940-41 agricultural year.

sufficiency of many rationed goods, the dysfunction of supplies, the need to resort to the "black market," the organizational deficiencies and corruption that this reality revealed, in a word, the endless problems, large and small, that the war introduced into the daily lives of millions of families. All the more so because, while the war mitigated or 'resolved' certain ills and hastened certain transformations, certain processes of modernization already slowed down by the pre-war economic and cultural situation, it also gave rise to new problems and new difficulties. Thus, to give an example, if, due to conscription, the sending of workers to Germany, and the growing needs of industry, unemployment was no-

When in ranks, the population remains disciplined, but as soon as it is left to its own devices, it becomes an amorphous mass susceptible to all weaknesses. [...]

Today is dedicated to unpopular measures. The rationing of bread will cause all Italians to grumble, especially the people, while the introduction of compulsory registration for industrial securities will raise fierce opposition from the plutocratic classes. That is why I have combined the two measures.

This measure was followed by a general reorganization of the services that had previously dealt with this complex matter, which were unified under the Ministry of Agriculture. As Rasi observed, "in essence, distribution was regulated in two ways: individual membership cards and provincial quotas. Although the two systems had the same objectives, they were based on different criteria, as the former disregarded usual regional consumption, while the latter was based on it. However, the tendency in membership was to take regional customs into account, where possible, in the qualitative composition of the ration; quotas maintained regional differences in consumption and, in the event of a reduction, this was applied in the same proportional measure for the various provinces."

Subsequently, rationing was also introduced for clothing and furnishing textiles, footwear, and other leather and hide products.

However, the overall results were not at all positive, both due to production deficiencies (which, among other things, forced a reduction in bread rations to 150 grams from March 15, 1942, and a gradual increase in the sifting index) and due to irregular supplies, so that during 1942 and the early months of 1943, the rules governing production, distribution, and consumption had to undergo a series of changes.

significantly decreased in many regions and overall, so much so that already in 1941, despite the increase in female labor (and also child labor), there was a shortage of agricultural labor, especially farmhands (which was not offset in terms of production by increases in machinery and was made worse by the scarcity of fertilizers and concentrated feed). a shortage that spread to industry the following year. However, all this had triggered a series of negative or only partially positive mechanisms, such as the establishment of a multiplicity of agricultural wage rates characterized by significant inequalities in similar and often neighboring agricultural areas with serious repercussions on production costs and, therefore, on price freezes and compliance with storage quotas, as well as the occurrence of urbanization phenomena that were difficult to control and created particularly precarious and difficult conditions for workers who had moved to the city or, more often, had to commute from their places of residence to their workplaces.

	1939		1940					
	December		May		September		December	
	number	X 1000 inhabitants	number	x 1000 inhabitants	number	X 1000 inhabitants	number	x 1000 inhabitants
Piedmont	38,600	10.9	30,000	8.4	22,100	6.2	28,950	8.1
Liguria	46,000	30.4	53,600	35.2	48,500	31.8	50,700	33.3
Lombardy	98,600	16.4	93,000	15.4	76,300	12.6	85,800	14.2
Venice Tridentina	7,300	10.5	4,000	5.8	2,500	3.6	3,900	5.7
Veneto	140,800	32.4	88,800	20.3	51,800	11.8	62,300	14.3
Venezia Giulia and Zara	30,000	29.7	28,200	27.7	22,300	21.9	20,600	20.2
Emilia	151,300	44.6	118,300	34.6	72,900	21.3	123,300	36.0
Tuscany	5,300	17.0	43,400	14.2	43,000	14.1	48,200	15.8
	18,000							

Some data are worth more than any long speech. As we have already said, the official cost of living index rose—according to data from the Central Statistical Institute, also accepted by Vannutelli and Repaci—from 4.53.9 in 1939 ^{to} 7.4 in 1942; but in reality the increase was greater: a report prepared for Mussolini by the Ministry

and, more generally, the significant differences between the industrial, agricultural, commercial, and white-collar sectors—based on official statistical data (according to

individual local situations or specific aspects¹ - are not only consistent in this regard, but also rich in information and assessments (and, for historians, suggestions for further study) both at the national level and in reference to various moments, provinces, localities, and episodes. Particularly useful for clarifying the consequences of the war on the country's living conditions are the periodic reports and reports of the police, the Carabinieri, and the censorship services (military and civil), the Ministry of Popular Culture, the Central Corporate Inspectorate, the trade unions, and the party. These reports, and especially the periodic general reports, clearly show that, alongside the 'economic situation' as a whole (i.e. the performance of the economy), and indeed even more so than this, the 'state of severe hardship' of the 'middle and working classes' and its progressive worsening constituted for the regime, until the end of 1942, the "most delicate sector" - much more so than that of "subversive activity" (i.e., anti-fascist) - and therefore the most closely monitored in all its aspects as the main indicator of the "public spirit" and its evolution. From these sources, it is also possible to glean a series of pieces of information (often not available elsewhere) that greatly enrich and articulate the general picture of "economic hardship" and allow us to better assess its nature and developments in at least three areas: social, local, and temporal. This information, therefore, helps to better understand the relationship between this hardship and the political attitude of the country.

Less than a year after entering the war, the "Political and Economic Situation of the Kingdom as of March 31, 1941-xix" outlined by the General Directorate of the P.S economic situation of the Kingdom as of March 31, 1941-xix" outlined by the General Directorate of the P.S.² was already largely focused on economic hardship:

The cost of living is rising sharply and progressively, as clearly shown by the index figures themselves, which only partially reflect reality.

This is a problem that is currently emerging in all its severity, because the material hardship that results from it affects the public mood no less than the spiritual hardship caused by other factors. If we want to face the facts, in their sincere reality, we must agree that all that remains of price controls is the name and, with the name, all the complicated structures theoretically designed to enforce them. The resources of workers and employees, and in general of all categories with a fixed income, which five or six years ago were sufficient to easily balance the family budget, today do not meet the most basic needs of life and are proving increasingly insufficient on a daily basis. The conditions of the most modest classes are truly worthy of the most careful consideration, for the same preventive purposes, and the sense of discipline that animates them does not act as a valid counterbalance to their depression, all the more so because they know that it is easy for others to get rich. The recent increase in family allowances has been greatly appreciated as proof of the government's interest, but it represents only minimal relief. Moreover, the desire of the people is not so much to achieve wage increases, which inevitably result in an incentive to raise prices, as to ensure that the cost of living is brought back, by any means necessary, within limits that are affordable for the working classes.

Another source of discontent is the membership card. It should be noted that the people are not at all hostile to it and indeed see it as a measure whose necessity does not need to be demonstrated, a useful provision designed to curb waste and abuse; nor would its extension to other goods, such as bread, be unwelcome, in order to avoid the incomprehensible inequalities between provinces that have enough and others where there is a serious shortage. What is needed, however, is that once national resources have been assessed and rations for the civilian population have been set on that basis, those rations should be distributed effectively and regularly, which unfortunately is not always the case, giving rise to criticism and discontent. [...]

The police, through the rigorous surveillance of the food supply teams, seek to curb price increases as much as possible and to crack down on any fraud or irregularities, but its actions are necessarily limited in their effectiveness and are also hampered by the connivance of consumers themselves who, although they are the most directly affected, always prefer the alternative of finding goods at higher prices to not finding them at all.

In addition to giving rise to administrative penalties in various cases, violations of food regulations are regularly reported to the judicial authorities. In this regard, it should be noted that, since the increase in penalties has shifted jurisdiction to the courts, this has resulted in a lengthening of the trial process, often to the benefit of defendants who are better able to defend themselves, not to mention that in many cases the collegiate judgment has proved too rigidly confined to theoretical doctrine in the face of crimes that are highly topical and require prompt and exemplary punishment if they are to serve as a deterrent.

The subsequent "situations" do not indicate any improvement in the situation, which, on the contrary, appears to be in constant decline and significantly aggravated by the consequences, including in economic and supply terms, of the first massive aerial bombardments by the Allies at the end of 1942.

by the Allies at the end of 1942. Despite its increasingly bureaucratic language and greater conciseness—almost reflecting a sense of disconsolate routine—the report dated December 31¹⁹⁴², is no less explicit:

The cost of living continues the sharp rise that has been unstoppable for several years now.

According to official statistics, the cost of living index has remained more or less stable in recent months, and in some provinces has even fallen slightly.

This does not suit people at all, who have not noticed any decrease in their household bills: the reason is that the statistics base their calculations on official prices, while the public has to deal with real prices and those of the black market if they want to provide themselves with food and other necessities.

Of course, life is very hard for modest families, and truly difficult for the very modest. Then there is a category of people who, having to maintain a minimum of decorum and not always being able to submit to the exorbitant demands of the clan-destiny trade, must suffer the harshest privations: these are the employees on minimum and average wages, who are deeply saddened by their inability to provide their families with the bare necessities.

By now, the expression "price freeze" has been emptied of all meaning: the multiple causes, which have been enumerated many times, refer in part to the inadequacies of corporate organization, as well as to the outright indiscipline of the population, in which hedonism—it is painful to have to admit—prevails over a sense of duty: this is linked to the fact that "wartime" is not, as it should be, deeply felt in people's consciences.

The vigilance of the food supply continues to be assiduous and active on the part of all police forces and achieves appreciable results, but it must necessarily limit itself to targeting the most serious infringements and the lowest forms of speculation: the phenomenon is in fact so widespread that it is impossible to think of eliminating it solely through repressive measures.

Compared to the "situation" highlighted by the police, the "Report on the economic situation as of December 1, 1942-xxi" by the ^{Central} Corporate Inspectorate is more detailed and elaborate, but, despite coming from a more immediately "political" body, the picture it paints is no different and merely anticipates in greater detail what—as we have just seen—the police would write more succinctly three weeks later:

The overall cost of living continued to show

. The phenomenon had a noticeable ac-

increase in cities affected by enemy air raids, where there has been a higher increase in the price of all foodstuffs, with the exception of the limited quantities that can be purchased with ration cards, an increase aggravated by the heavy burden that many of the inhabitants of the aforementioned centers have had to bear as a result of displacement.

The situation that arose in these centers, particularly in Genoa and Turin, also led to a reduction in earnings for many workers, due to shorter working hours in order to allow the numerous displaced persons to leave in the evening.

The abnormal situation in the affected cities and the need to cope with sudden and unexpected demands led to a sharp increase in the number of savers going to banks to withdraw their deposits.

While certain sectors of economic activity experienced a more or less extensive and prolonged interruption, other sectors saw unusual and marked movement. Thus, immediately after the first raids, there was a frantic search for both labor and various materials to carry out the first urgent repairs to the damage caused by the bombing, as well as for means of transport to transfer people and household goods to the provinces.

Obviously, the demand for goods and services exceeded what was possible at the time, and while the civil and military authorities immediately took appropriate measures to provide assistance, much had to be left to the initiative of individuals. The situation thus created led to a sudden and considerable increase in the prices of goods and services locally, which, despite the recommendations and then the repressive action of the authorities, reached very high levels, especially in the field of transport and auxiliary traffic activities. The same phenomenon occurred, at least initially, with rents for housing in outlying areas, where a significant proportion of the population of the affected cities had moved. In this sector, the timely action of the political authorities curbed the initial excessive abuses.

With regard to consumption, it is worth mentioning the situation of fixed windows, which have recently been blocked. Glass production had already been facing serious difficulties for some time due to fuel shortages, and therefore the sudden surge in demand found the market in conditions far from normal. Needless to say, only a small part of the demand could be met. There was also intense demand for plywood, used as a substitute for glass in windows, shop windows, etc.

In the food sector, the civic spirit of most retailers and the prompt action of local food departments (replenishment of destroyed stocks, increased availability in some stores to compensate for the closure of damaged stores) ensured that no worrying imbalances arose.

Even in the days immediately following the raids, supplies for the population were provided without excessive difficulty, given the abnormal situation, and, in addition, arrangements were made for an extraordinary distribution of goods such as meat, eggs, and jam. Arrangements were also made in a timely manner to ensure that the population of the cities, who had moved to smaller towns in the provinces, were immediately able to obtain basic necessities locally.

In other sectors, there was a decline in consumption and sales, due in part to the fact that, in addition to the numerous damaged shops, there were temporary

Many others ceased trading when their owners suddenly left the city. The timely intervention of the authorities and the threat of license withdrawal served to normalize the situation.

Regardless of the particular conditions in which the cities affected by air raids found themselves, the supply of foodstuffs, both rationed and unrationed, was marked in November by delays in the distribution of the former in various locations and by a general increase in the prices of the latter.

The clandestine purchase of meat, fats, flour, poultry, etc. at significantly higher prices has now become habitual and, in some cases, inevitable even for the most modest classes, due to the frequent delays in the distribution of rationed goods. In some districts of Rome and Naples, for example, rations of butter, oil, sugar, and pasta for the month of November were only distributed between the 25th and 30th of that month.

To supplement and clarify what has been said so far in general terms, many interesting details could easily be added; Rather than dwelling on them, which would inevitably be too brief given the nature of our work, we prefer to focus on some aspects of the Italian reality during the war years that we consider most important for understanding the country's acceptance of the war and the fascist regime and on which, moreover, there is much confusion and diversity of opinion among scholars.

A first aspect is that of the impact of economic difficulties on the various social classes. It is impossible to establish a sort of ranking, even a rough one, both because of the lack of sufficient reliable and comparable data and because of the diversity of situations. Some are economic in nature: between the North and South, between the various regions, between larger and smaller centers, between centers with a predominantly industrial economy (and, within these, between those with a greater presence of military industry and those with a lesser presence) and centers with a predominantly agricultural economy; between different agricultural areas (in terms of land ownership and production); not to mention the very particular but extremely important case of Rome, which was both a bureaucratic city and, at the same time, linked in many ways to the surrounding agricultural economy. Others are of a completely different type: tradition, culture, giving this term its broadest meaning, to include different ways of life and of feeling one's *status a n d* , therefore, of considering certain needs more or less indispensable; not to mention the particular cultural and psychological situations of multi-national areas such as South Tyrol and, even more so, Venezia Giulia.

There is no doubt that the economic situation caused by the war and the difficulties faced by large sections of the country had an impact on the attitude of Italians towards the war and the regime. However, based on the available documentation, it is impossible to determine the extent of this impact, both in general and

on the various social classes is impossible, unless we resort to generalizations that in fact mean very little and in some cases may be incorrect. Even in the absence of incontrovertible data, some available indicators seem to suggest that this impact - at least until the end of 1942, when other extra-economic or not immediately economic factors intervened - was less than is generally believed. Among these indicators, we will limit ourselves to mentioning only a few, which we believe to be the most significant.

First of all, the trend in deposits (in millions of lire) at savings banks, first-class pawnshops, and ^{postal} banks:

Savings banks		Post office savings banks		
and pawnshops of 1 st cat.	- Ordinary deposits	ordinary deposits	interest- bearing bonds	current accounts

real estate investments by small savers and the prevailing tendency to hoard money and, above all, to avoid as far as possible tying up and losing the free availability of one's money. Characteristic of this trend were the panic and subsequent rush to withdraw bank deposits that occurred in November 1941 in some locations, including Milan, immediately after the publication in the *Giornale d'Italia* and *Il Popolo d'Italia* of an article by V. Gayda on 'compulsory savings'. As on December 2, Inspector General of Police Peruzzi reported to

The "Survey of the financial market in 1942," drawn up in early 1943 by the Fascist Confederation of Credit and Insurance Companies, not only clearly summarizes the general trend of the financial market, but also suggests both the mood and concerns of most buyers and how the collapse of the stock market (already in difficulty due to the increasingly difficult economic situation) was, at least in part, desired by the government financial authorities in order to encourage a wider placement of Treasury bonds, which were increasingly necessary to fuel the national finances. Among other things, it states:

The performance of the financial market during these three years of war can be summarized in three periods, each of which presents a different phase.

In the first (1940-1941), there was a frantic rush to buy real estate and industrial assets, with stock hoarding reaching its peak in September 1941. During this stock market rally, no attention was paid to the dividends distributed, and some stocks reached levels that were certainly not in line with their income, with a capitalization rate of less than 2 percent.

In the second period (1941-1942), the lira made a comeback with the gradual and steady increase in government bonds, which peaked in October 1942. The timely and explicit statements by the Duce and the Minister of Finance in defense of the lira, and the assurances given by the Minister to the millions of subscribers, who had subscribed for 210 billion over the previous eight years, that if there were any tax considerations, these would be reserved for them, drew the attention of savers to government bonds, which saw a significant wave of purchases and a flattering recovery in prices.

The third period, which began immediately after the depression that occurred in the last quarter of 1941, following the measure reflecting the nominative nature of shares, a measure that must be considered, regardless of the tax rules contained therein, as a further development of the financial policy pursued by the Government, and a new practical affirmation of its desire to defend the lira. The stock market was sluggish, but there were signs of a slow recovery. From 10,000 securities traded in the first session of the year on the Milan Stock Exchange, the volume of trading improved steadily until it reached an almost normal level at the end of January. The numerous capital increases of those companies which, before the deadline set for December 31, 1941, availed themselves of the option granted by Articles 30 and 31 of Royal Decree Law No. 1729 of October 19, 1937, and Law No. 277 of April 18, 1941, by approving certain transfers of reserves to capital through the issue of bonus shares and others through the issue of bonus and paid-up shares, for a total amount of approximately one billion, managed to revive the market throughout the month of January.

Subsequently, new unrest emerged in the stock market, partly due to the delayed publication of regulations governing the transfer of registered securities, which led to a decline in savings flowing into equities. At the same time, there was a renewed rush towards other real asset investments, particularly real estate and land, which reached prices that raised concerns about the future of agriculture. reached prices that raised concerns about the future of agriculture.

The Duce intervened promptly, as always, with his memorable speech on March 26 to the managers of the cooperative banks, which had a considerable impact on the stock markets.

On March 31, the supplementary provisions to Royal Decree Law No. 25 of 1941 were published, but the crisis of adjustment and adaptation to the new regime imposed by the registration of securities, which was supposed to have ended with that publication, did not cease. the reluctance of some categories of savers to register their securities meant that even option rights were sold at prices below the par value derived from the respective quotations of the individual securities. On the other hand, available funds seeking investment flocked to government securities, and subscriptions to nine-year 5% bonds maturing on April 15, 1951, reached 24 billion 541 million lire, an unprecedented figure in the country's financial history and 4 billion 0311 million higher than the amount of subscriptions collected in September 1941.

The unease on the stock market became even more pronounced after the decree of May 2, which

Senise¹, in the Lombard capital (where panic was greatest and around 300 million lire were withdrawn in three days, three times the normal average withdrawal), the article immediately set in motion a typical alarmist process:

the article on compulsory savings, or 'iron savings', published by the *Giornale d'Italia* and signed by Virginio Gayda, and reported by *Popolo d'Italia*, had been widely commented on by the public.

Those in the know added that this measure, already implemented in Germany, would also be decided in Italy at the first Council of Ministers meeting.

The news was given credence, both because of Gayda's notoriety, considered by those in the know to be the interpreter of the Duce's thinking, and because the article was then reproduced by the Duce's own newspaper.

The provision on the reporting of incomes exceeding 24,000 lire further aggravated the latent concerns of the mass of savers; and since no one has yet been able to ascertain the true purpose and scope of this mandatory reporting, the most reckless rumors have circulated, including that of a forced loan, which the Council of Ministers was supposed to deliberate on.

rare in the session of November 29, and the other concerning the prohibition of withdrawing more than 500 lire at a time from savings accounts.

The rumors became more insistent as the date of the Council of Ministers meeting approached, and so the most cunning and the most fearful rushed to withdraw their deposits, infecting, as happens in such cases, relatives and acquaintances.

That said, the fact remains that an increase in deposits of the magnitude recorded at institutions that traditionally collected a large portion of the savings of the lower-middle and working classes, accompanied by a decline in pawn loans (to which can be added, at least to some extent, a decline in protests¹), suggests not so much a picture of marked economic decline in these groups, but rather one of their overall condition (given that there are significant differences in trends between regions) at least not having worsened.

To these data can be added those relating to the evolution of agricultural property which, although referring to a longer period of time (late December 1938 to June 1946), suggest not a process of concentration at the expense of smaller properties, but rather an increase, albeit ^{modest}, something similar to what had occurred during the First World War, ^{and} therefore to a situation in which farmers, at least in some areas, were able to purchase the land they worked and, in general, were not forced to sell what they owned.

Another piece of data relating to a completely different socio-economic reality, but which we feel is worth mentioning in order to provide a better overview of the economic situation during the war years, concerns the performance of joint-stock companies. These companies recorded a steady increase in nominal share capital and, until the end of 1941, also in the number of companies themselves: it was only in 1942 that this began to decline, to the detriment of

¹ According to ISTAT, *Summary of Italian Historical Statistics 1861-1955*, p. 90, the number of protests, which in 1939 had been 1, 262, 615 for 914 million lire, fell in 1940 to 1,1216 for 827 million, in 1941: 577,724 for 599 million; 1942: 297,627 for 540 million.

Bankruptcies followed a similar trend, see *ibid*.

² See ISTAT, *Statistical Yearbook on Italian Agriculture 1939-1942*, pp. 3-4 ff.; SVIMEZ, *Statistics on Southern Italy 1851-1952*, pp. 152 ff., on the basis of which the table on the following page was constructed.

³ See the *final report* by G. LORENZONI to the [INEA] *inquiry into the formation of small farms in the post-war period*, Rome 1938.

⁴ According to ISTAT, *Summary of Italian Historical Statistics 1861-1955*, p. 89, the total number of sales contracts signed between 1939 and 1942 showed the following trend:

Land	Land with buildings	Buildings
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especially smaller companies (with share capital of up to 2,500,000 lire), which were no longer able to cope with the general deterioration of the economic situation and competition from ^{larger} companies.

Distribution of agricultural property based on cadastral entries by area class as of December 31, 1938, and June 30, 1946.

Areas as of December 31, 1942	Total number properties		Up to 50 ha			
	1938	1946	Number of properties		area	
			1938	1946	1938	1946
					1,615.958	

On the basis of what has been said so far and the available archival documentation, we believe that we must first of all reject the assertion of those who have argued that the greatest economic burdens and hardships were borne by

From 50 to 100 ha				From 100 to 1000 ha				From 1000 ha and above			
Number own*		superb		number property		area	property	number area			
1938	1946	1938	1946	1938	1946	1938	1946	1938	1946	1938	1946
1,308	1,765	89,804	123,446	1,273	1,693	33,305	428,197	152	148	417,094	471,390
29	232	1,864	15,851	67	224	23,876	61,366	5	7	9,984	12,712
3,006	3,179	207,959	219,407	2,136	2,158	468,231	474,480	9i	103	244,905	291,402
1,069	1,107	73,558	76,017	1,244	1,278	390,286	401,305	209	211	433,203	440,861

it would have been the peasant world. A "world" which, above all, cannot be described as a unified reality and which must first be broken down and examined in its many and varied aspects: wage earners, settlers, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and direct farmers. Even if we wanted to limit the discussion to the most numerous categories and confine ourselves to a very general assessment, the state of research does not, in our opinion, allow us to venture beyond an extremely generic statement: it is possible that in certain areas the greatest burdens and hardships were borne by the peasants, while in others this can be ruled out with certainty.

The fact that agricultural workers' wages were officially lower than those of factory workers meant very little, both because in many areas, as soon as labor began to become scarce, real wages began to rise (in the province of Naples, for example, in March 1942, the ^{Carabinieri} reported that 'agricultural labor' was able to 'impose enormous prices'), and in areas with more profitable crops (such as the Castelli Romani), they skyrocketed; and because they were often supplemented 'in kind'; and finally because large sectors of the farming world were able to make considerable gains on the free market (in Piedmont, to continue with examples, in the early months of 1942: speculators and wholesalers snapped up the future fruit harvest by offering the wholesale price at that time at retail²⁾ and on the "black market." We therefore believe that the "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of December 31, 1942-xxi"³ was correct, which states:

Although wages in the industrial sector are nominally higher than in the agricultural sector, the conditions of the working class are becoming increasingly inadequate in relation to the cost of living: this is due to the fact that in industry—apart from a few sporadic cases of evasion—wages are effectively frozen and there are none of the forms of accommodation that exist in agriculture, where payment in kind provides considerable economic advantages. Furthermore, the civil mobilization of all industrial company employees makes it impossible for workers to move whenever the possibility of higher earnings arises.

Similarly, the numerous disturbances that occurred in the countryside and in smaller towns in agricultural areas (and also in some larger towns), starting mainly at the end of the summer of 1941 (but there had been previous cases), against high prices, hoarding, irregularities and shortages of supplies, etc., should not be overestimated. That

These protests, almost exclusively involving women, prove the existence of widespread economic hardship. This is beyond question and was, moreover, explicitly acknowledged by the police and the Carabinieri. However, their dynamics do not allow us to consider them proof that the condition of peasants was worse than that of workers or the lower middle class.

Among the elements that emerge from their examination, two seem to us to be most significant in this regard. The first is the clear prevalence (in terms of both the number of cases and participants) of unrest in the south (especially in Sicily, Campania, and Puglia) and in particularly backward areas compared to that in the center-north. The second is the fact that, although they punctuated most of the war years, they took place mainly at certain particular moments and in certain circumstances, which suggests that they were motivated by contingent factors of an essentially psychological nature rather than by a particular worsening of the living conditions of the peasants. At these particular moments, the usual causes of these disturbances (high cost of living and irregularities and shortages in supplies, above all) were compounded by others that originated in the exasperation aroused by the conviction of being victims of particularly unfair treatment, in the spread of alarmist or even false rumors, and in the fear of a possible worsening of the current situation.

During 1941-42, when women's unrest took on an endemic character, albeit with ups and downs (we will not go into the events of 1943 for the moment, as they belong to a different context), there were two moments when it was particularly widespread and lively: at the end of September 1940 - beginning of 1941 and in the spring-summer of 1942. The first¹ about a hundred in the space of ten days (half of which in Sicily and Campania), were provoked by the introduction of bread rationing and, at times, by its poor implementation, especially with regard to the supplements provided for certain categories of workers². The documentation

Rather than a particularly serious and widespread hardship among the peasantry, this trend reflects the existence within it of pockets of more acute hardship corresponding to the most depressed and backward areas, where the war had a greater impact than elsewhere and triggered moods and reactions typical of peasant culture and psychology, primarily women's instinctive aversion to this war, as to any war.

Finally, it should be noted that women's protests also took place during the First World War, particularly in 1916 and especially in ¹⁹¹⁷. A comparison with these protests confirms the pacifist nature of the female agricultural world, on which the scale of conscription, the modesty of subsidies, and the poor organization of the seasonal work permit system placed a series of burdens greater than those borne by women from other social classes. Beyond this confirmation, however, the comparison highlights more differences than similarities and raises various issues that would be too simplistic to dismiss by citing the different political regimes during the two wars and the 'awareness' of the greater risks to which the demonstrators of 1941-42 would have been exposed. The unrest of 1916-17 involved a significantly larger number of women and occurred mainly in different regions and areas, more in the north and center than in the south, compared to those that were the main theater of the unrest of 1941-42, and also affected some large urban centers such as Milan. Their pacifist stance was not only more explicit but also more robust, so that, although they almost always arose spontaneously and were also caused by high prices and food shortages, they revealed a fundamental politicization—elementary, but in many cases capable of inducing the demonstrators to try to involve other social groups in the protest.

It is highly doubtful that actual turnover can be assessed by referring only to official figures, as all available sources agree in denouncing the almost universal practice of the "black market" and the increasingly widespread use of a series of expedients aimed at circumventing rationing, and Mussolini, speaking on April 25, 1942, to the general secretaries of Lombardy, went so far as to say that, out of 700,000 merchants, 100,000 had been reported for food rationing offenses. We therefore believe that the General Directorate of the Public Security was ultimately right when it wrote in its aforementioned "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of December 31, 1942-xxi":

Trade is currently more than ever influenced by profoundly disruptive causes, both material and psychological... It is therefore very difficult to form an accurate picture of the conditions faced by traders: according to them, the restrictions imposed on them are so numerous and severe that they are forced to make considerable sacrifices in order to keep their businesses alive, while the public is convinced that traders are making more money than ever before. Looking at things objectively, it seems that the second opinion is closer to reality: the real hardships are borne by the producer or the consumer—more by the latter than the former—while the merchant, who limits himself to the exchange phase, does not venture into purchases unless he is certain he can resell at a profit, and sells at bargain prices what he cannot easily obtain. This does not deny that in certain branches of commerce there are situations of particular hardship, such as for food retailers, goldsmiths, and in general for those who carry out activities that are partially or totally sacrificed to the discipline of war; but in most cases, a few clandestine sales are enough to compensate them amply, and it is highly doubtful that they have any qualms about engaging in such activities.

What is certain is that the number of bankruptcies and protests is extremely low and that negotiations at inflated prices are carried out normally and without the possibility of effective repression, because the contracting parties are in agreement, there are no witnesses, the surcharge is paid under the table, and invoices are regularly drawn up for the permitted amount.

The only statement that can be made in very general terms concerns white-collar workers (mainly civil servants, but also private sector employees) and, more generally, those on fixed incomes. Although precise data are not available, it is highly likely that, as a whole, they were among those who suffered most from the economic hardship and discomfort imposed by the restrictions, partly because of the greater difficulty they had in obtaining adjustments to their salaries and incomes and in evading taxation to some extent, and partly because of their psychological and cultural need to safeguard their social *status* as much as possible—they were among those who suffered most from the economic hardship and hardship imposed by the war. It is symptomatic that all available sources

Not only do they agree in reporting the progress of their "growing discontent," but, more importantly, they do not contest or question its ^{validity}, as in other cases. In essence, they reveal a single reservation—never expressed directly, but reported as an insistently circulating rumor—namely that it was not uncommon for employees, especially civil servants and those in Rome in particular, to supplement their salaries, so to speak, by allowing themselves to be bribed or by forcing, through their "bureaucratic" slowness and their obstructionism, those who had to pass under their yoke to resort to 'third parties' to 'grease' the bureaucratic machine. The accusation, in truth, is not confirmed by judicial statistics which, compared to an average of 7,497 complaints per year in 1931-39, record 4,348, 3,702, and 5,641 complaints of corruption and private interest in official acts "against the public administration" in 1940, 1941, and 1942, 4,348, 3,702, and 5,641 reports of corruption and private interest in official acts "against the public administration." This fact may perhaps lead us to downplay the extent of the phenomenon compared to what is claimed by *popular opinion*, but not to consider the accusation *completely* unfounded. In fact, the spread of corruption can be explained not only by economic reasons but also by the weakening during the war years of the 'loyalty' to the regime of those sectors of the country, such as the public administration, which had joined it thinking that it could better than any other ensure positive continuity and, at the same time, innovation in a series of values that they considered primary and which they now found to be completely ineffective and internally corrupt; The same perspective also explains the low number of complaints, which, on the contrary, takes on a particular significance: it is a symptom of the moral disengagement taking place in the country, particularly among the middle classes, and of the formation of a sort of solidarity among those "exploited" and disappointed by the state, in the name of the priority of private interests over public ones.

The fact that until the end of 1942 the problem most felt by the masses, certainly by the working classes, but also by large sections of the middle classes, was

The difficulties of everyday life should not lead to hasty conclusions. Apart from specific situations, these difficulties were never such as to make living conditions unbearable for the vast majority of Italians—a people who, at the time, were very frugal—nor did they lead to reactions that, combined with the disappointment and discontent aroused by the course of the war, could take on political significance and content and thus truly worry the regime. This was all the more so because, on the one hand, the various social classes and categories were largely uncommunicative with each other (and often fragmented internally according to local situations and contractual stratifications), animated by a particularistic view of their own interests and distrustful (if not hostile) and jealous of each other (always considered privileged and often bloodsuckers), and, on the other hand, there was a lack of forces in the country capable of channeling their discontent and dissatisfaction and overcoming that sense of powerlessness that began to characterize the attitude of increasingly large sectors of the population when the enthusiasm of the first months of the war and the initial hopes, sometimes certainties, for a quick and victorious conclusion began to fade and become increasingly vague.

The documentation relating to the 'public spirit' is, in this regard, significant. Very attentive to picking up on every change and reporting any

of alarmist rumors, etc., so that its effects on the "public spirit" rarely coincided and could be added to those determined by military events. Significant in this regard is the observation with which the General Directorate of Public Security, in mid-January 1943, concluded its analysis of the "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom" at the end of 1942:

The prolongation of the war, the progress of operations in North Africa and Russia, the onset of winter, the bombings, and the accentuated economic hardship have undoubtedly depressed public spirit even further.

By the end of September, the euphoria caused by certain favorable events had already begun to fade due to the unexpected resistance of Stalingrad, which dashed hopes of an imminent collapse of the Soviet Union.

The approaching cold season certainly contributed to the depression, while the lack of many necessary items, especially coal and wood, and the insufficient rationing of basic necessities did not help to keep the population's morale high. However, this was partly offset by news from the Egyptian front, which promised further successes in that sector.

Instead, with the British advance in Cyrenaica, came the bombing of our cities, which aroused a sense of deep dismay, not only because of the number of victims and the extent of the damage, but also because of the ease with which the attacks had been carried out.

The echo spread rapidly from the battered cities, carried by refugees, in whose eyes one could read the terror of the tragic hours they had experienced, while the sudden American landing in Algeria even turned people's minds to the danger of an invasion of their homeland.

Public spirit is very low today: fortunately, the food situation is rather favorable at the moment, so that moral unease is not exacerbated by hunger.

Another fact that is clear from the reports of the police, the Carabinieri, and the postal censorship services is that—as we have already mentioned—irritation over the growing spread of the black market and ^{hoarding}, as well as the inefficiency of the

corruption of the bodies that should have prevented them and that were responsible for controlling production, distributing supplies, and monitoring the market. Every measure taken against "black market dealers," hoarders, speculators, and those who, through incompetence or collusion, failed to crack down on their activities was welcomed (and there were those who would have liked to see even more drastic measures) and raised hopes for improvement. However, these hopes regularly turned into further irritation and discontent as soon as the measures adopted proved to be insufficient, useless, and sometimes even harmful. This led to growing mistrust and discredit, which initially affected the organs of the PNF and then also those of the state. Initially, criticism of the latter was less harsh and focused more on their general unpreparedness to deal with the reality of the conflict (responsibility for the intervention was generally attributed to Mussolini and fascism) than on their substantial operational inefficiency. However, this criticism later gained the upper hand, effectively absorbing the other and merging with a third criticism that made little distinction between the party and the state: that relating to corruption. In the special report on Rome attached to the Carabinieri's "memo for the Duce" on the situation in September 1942, there are some notes that help to understand how much this criticism contributed to the delegitimization of the state and the regime in general and, at the same time, the complexity and contradictions

and restrictive nature of the law of July 8, 1941, which regulated the matter and, in particular, no longer granted conditional and provisional release and reduced financial penalties in favor of prison sentences. Unfortunately, we have not found significant data on the proceedings of 1942-43 to assess the effects of this crackdown. The only thing that is certain is that, after an initial setback, the number of complaints continued to increase (*Grandi Archive*, b. 127, phase 183, sub-files 3 and 6).

¹ Despite the progressive discredit they suffered, the state authorities, and in particular the prefectural authorities, enjoyed greater prestige than the fascist authorities (i.e., the PNF) until July 25, 1943, to the point that even those who most insistently demanded the adoption of drastic measures against hoarders and "black marketeers" nevertheless judged the violence of the squads (which the General Directorate of the P.S. defined as 'prejudicial' not only to public order but also to the 'public spirit') carried out especially from February 1941 onwards in various locations by fascist hardliners and certain party federations for whom the 'black market' and hoarding were *tout-court* manifestations of anti-fascism and defeatism.

² See, on this last point, what the CCRR wrote in the "Memorandum for the Duce" relating to September 1941, on the eve of the introduction of bread rationing: "Examined in general terms, the internal situation can be considered to be in a state of transition as a result of the economic measures currently being implemented.

As always happens in these periods of adjustment, there are numerous and not always favorable comments.

It is noteworthy, however, that criticism is directed especially at the central authorities, which are accused of not having been timely and systematic in issuing the provisions governing the war economy. Many people, albeit in a very cautious and guarded manner, attribute to the aforementioned bodies the harshness of the restrictions just imposed, for not having examined and appropriately regulated the entire economic complex of the nation at the appropriate time in relation to the availability

that the events of the war, primarily those involving Italy and more generally those involving the Axis powers (to a much lesser extent, given the distance, those involving Japan), with their ups and downs and the "psychological fluctuations" they caused, had an equally and increasingly greater influence on the "public spirit" as a whole, and even more so when viewed in terms of its various social and cultural components.

In the very first months after Italy's entry into the war, when the German landing in England and the victorious end of the war were considered imminent, the "Public spirit" was high, to the point that in certain areas—especially in Veneto—there were cases of priests and small Catholic groups criticizing "youthful enthusiasm for the war."¹ Calls to arms took place without problems, and there were even cases of older people requesting to be called up and sent to the front lines. The poor performance of the Italian army on the Western Front and the absence of major military initiatives in North Africa initially aroused disappointment and irritation rather than real concern. For the initial optimism to begin to crack in mid-August, it took the gradual realization that the war would not be over before winter, the initial economic difficulties, and the depressing effect of some British air raids on Milan, Turin, and other locations in northern Italy, which caused limited damage and few casualties but made a deep impression because they were completely unexpected. Significant is what a party informant reported in a report written the day after the raid on Milan:

The enemy air raid on Milan has somewhat depressed public morale. According to my personal impression, listening to people from all walks of life...

The British nighttime action was all the more impressive because it was *completely* unexpected, at least by the vast majority. In fact, after the armistice with France, the conviction had taken root, confirmed by about a month and a half of tranquility, that our city was safe from enemy incursions given its distance from the bases. not only that, but the great masses were convinced that it was physically impossible for the British to reach Milan, given that the Italian and German air forces had undisputed control of the skies. The surprise was therefore very great and the psychological reaction all the more pronounced.

Overall, however, the situation remained favorable until the first resounding failures in Greece. At the end of October, the General Directorate of Public Security summarized it in a "note" that is confirmed by extensive documentation and parallel assessments made by the CCRR and the PNF, as well as by the bodies responsible for various sectors of the national economy. In the first few pages, the 'note' summarized the overall situation of industry, agriculture, trade, and food, the state of unemployment, and the condition of workers (both in industry and agriculture). In the following pages, it drew some conclusions from this overview that are worth quoting in full:

The economic situation, considered as a whole, is generally considered to be quite satisfactory, given the particular conditions at the moment. In some provinces, however, there are reports of considerable hardship, specifically in Catania, Catanzaro, Genoa, Imperia, Livorno, Messina, Naples, Nuoro, Reggio Calabria, Sondrio, Trieste, and Vercelli. Particular mention should be made of the provinces of Apuania, Cosenza, and Palermo, where the economic situation is considered to be especially serious. Furthermore, almost all provinces report hardship that strongly affects the working and white-collar classes who, unlike others who have somewhat flexible incomes to meet greater needs, are struggling with serious difficulties and are unable to cope with the continuous rise in the cost of living. Even more than the working class, it is the middle class that is forced to make the greatest sacrifices.

This is clearly reflected in *the mood of the population*, although there is widespread understanding of the exceptional circumstances we are experiencing, which makes people bear the resulting hardships with resignation. In the aftermath of the war, the masses are still animated by a spirit of lively patriotism and no one doubts the victory of our arms, although many who had hoped for a quick resolution now look with some apprehension at the prospect of a winter of war. A sense of anxious anticipation prevails in everyone, but this is overshadowed by an absolute and unshakeable faith in the DUCE.

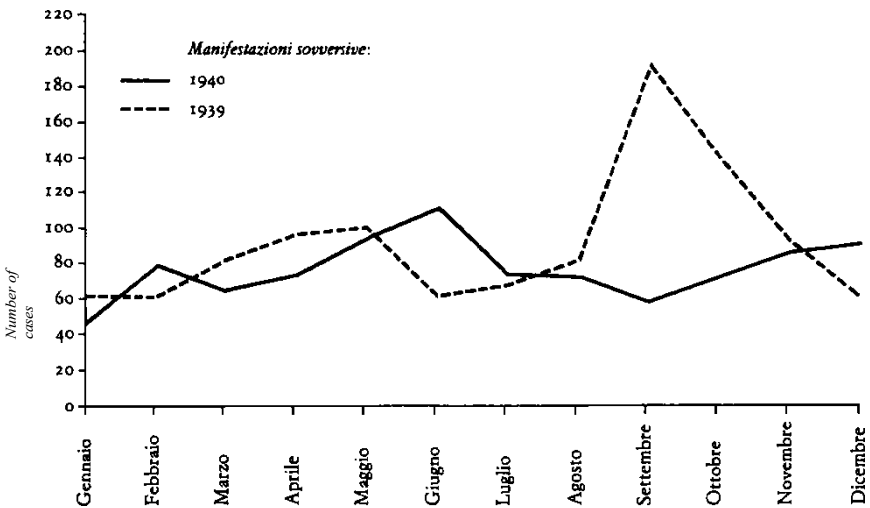
The political situation is good everywhere. The population is following the regime's directives in an orderly manner, relations between the party hierarchy and provincial authorities are becoming increasingly cooperative, and the clergy and Catholic organizations are generally remaining within the bounds of legality, although

Although their universal principles of brotherhood end up having a depressing effect, the Jews show no obvious signs of impatience. The Party organizations are actively working to penetrate ever more deeply into the souls of the masses, who in some provinces are somewhat apathetic. In the provinces of Alessandria, Bari, Brescia, Campobasso, Imperia, Milan, Ragusa, Ravenna, Trieste, Udine, and Verona, deficiencies have been noted, consisting of slowdowns in activity, a lack of sufficient dynamism, local quarrels, or the inability of leaders who are not up to the task.

Anti-fascism is reduced to sporadic attitudes of individuals, who are always singled out and targeted, and manifests itself in infrequent episodes of intolerance, verbal outbursts, furtive graffiti, and more often in loud protests.

Similarly, *subversive activity* shows no signs of life, with the exception of a few isolated demonstrations, and there are no signs of a resurgence. All individuals considered capable of carrying out activities contrary to national interests are strictly monitored by the police.

A significant confirmation of this picture is provided by the trend in "subversive demonstrations." The year before, at the outbreak of the war, they had recorded a real surge; another, albeit much smaller, surge occurred in April, May, and early June 1940, on the eve of Italy's entry into the war; however, by June and then in July, August, and part of September, their number had steadily declined, only to rise again (but always remaining below the peak of May-June).



⁽¹⁾ACS, *Private Secretariat of the Duce, Correspondence (1922-1943)*, b. 164, f. 2 3, "Memorandum for the Duce" from the CGRR relating to December 1940.

Further confirmation is provided by the very low number of reports to the judicial

and of indignation and harsh criticism, especially towards the high ^{military} command. However, the wealth of documentation available shows that it took less than a month for the criticism to extend to politicians, who were accused even more harshly than the military. The

Badoglio's "resignation" and rumors about the imminent departure of Cavagnari and Pricolo contributed significantly to this shift in the focus of criticism; partly because Badoglio, as mentioned, enjoyed great esteem and trust in the country, and partly because of the role played in his departure by Farinacci, who, on the other hand, was generally viewed with hostility, and partly because, as they were not accompanied by those of any political figure, not even Ciano, whom the *vox populi* had almost immediately identified (along with Jacomoni) as the person most responsible for the attack and the failures suffered by the Italian army, the marshal appeared to many—even among the common people—increasingly as the scapegoat for faults that were not his, or at least not only his, partly, in the end, because of the action consciously taken in this sense by the staunch supporters of Badoglio and, more or less unconsciously, by many military personnel indignant at the accusations leveled at the armed forces by large sectors of fascism.

Strong throughout the country, this outrage and criticism were particularly intense in Rome, where news filtered through more readily and it was easy to grasp the

particular moods and underground struggles between various political and military circles, and from Rome they spread throughout Italy, even reaching the military in Greece and ^{North} Africa. That said, it should also be noted that amid the indignation and criticism of the bourgeoisie, and in particular of those who, to be clear, can be defined as 'intellectuals' and

There was a considerable difference between the sentiments expressed by the "patriotic" classes and those expressed by the rest of the country. For the former, what was unfolding was a great *national* drama, while for the masses it was above all a *personal* drama, in which the ideal, patriotic, national aspect took second place—if it did not disappear altogether—to the daily problems of life, which the negative course of military operations, on the one hand, aggravated and, on the other, projected into a future that was not only increasingly bleak but, above all, increasingly distant, to the point that it often became the only problem that was truly felt and potentially capable of influencing the attitude of the masses themselves. Typical in this regard is the picture of the situation in the province of Venice (but the same applies to the whole country) that the police chief outlined to the head of the police towards the end of the year:

In general, it can be said that there is no longer any typical subversive activity in the province. With the residual elements that stirred up the masses eliminated, all organized propaganda has disappeared.

However, there is widespread anti-fascist discontent, caused by the less favorable economic conditions of certain classes, which manifests itself in recriminations, albeit timidly concealed.

However, no political or economic defeatism has been detected so far, so that no measures more severe than warnings and the suspension of a few public establishments, centers of rumor-mongering, have been applied.

Ultimately, with even small manifestations of anti-fascism reduced and almost disappeared, what is noticeable today is rather *a wavering* and *persistent demand for economic improvements*, rather than declarations of political convictions with an anti-fascist or anti-nationalist background...

The less optimistic forecasts regarding the duration of the conflict and doubts about the possibility of immediately reaping the hoped-for benefits—especially when compared with the

war expenditure - the current restrictions and the less fortunate events of the war in recent times have transformed the state of confident expectation into one of anxious uncertainty, which the various classes consider - eliminating any idealistic elements - solely in terms of their personal interests.

November and December perhaps marked the moment of greatest depression and greatest criticism of the regime. This is indirectly confirmed by the alarmed tone with which the Carabinieri summarized the "state of public sentiment" in their "memo to the Duce" for the month of December, a tone that would not be found again until the end of 1942 and the first months of 1943.

The mood of all social classes is essentially disoriented and very depressed.

This phenomenon, which appears worthy of serious consideration, is undoubtedly caused in part by the economic malaise that has become very noticeable, but its primary origin lies in the deep and intense bitterness over our failures, which, while inviting harsh comments and bitter criticism, have determined and accentuated a state of perplexity and concern.

The prevailing opinion in the various provinces is that the current unfortunate events are due to the country's lack of preparation for war and to military and political errors, which many are calling for to be remedied with urgent and radical measures.

So far, there have been no public outbursts of anger, and many say that this is due more to fear of severe penalties than to a spirit of discipline. but beyond superficial observation, it is easy to see that there is serious discontent in every social class, which, stemming from the sacrifices endured by the people with the suppression of their needs, calls for the punishment of those responsible, the elimination of the causes of the harmful events, and, in particular, a change of direction in the conduct of the war.

It should also be noted that the prospects for a rapid resolution of the conflict have become very unclear among the masses, so much so that many, seeing that our armed forces are forced to yield to the enemy due to a lack of resources, are wondering with great concern what might happen in the future. This highlights the fact that the people's confidence is waning; it is often said that prompt intervention by our allies would be preferable, even if this were to further damage our prestige.

Even in January and for most of February 1941, the atmosphere remained very tense and depressed, to the point that even in correspondence between families and soldiers—which was known to be subject to censorship—there were "open criticisms of the work of the leaders." In addition to the continuing precariousness of the situation on the Greek-Albanian front, the unfavorable course of the war in Africa also contributed greatly to this situation.

northern Italy and ^{Ethiopia}, the bombing of various cities (Palermo, Catania, Messina, Trapani, Reggio Calabria, Naples, Milan, etc.), a certain worsening of the economic situation, not very significant in reality, but sufficient to appear at that time as proof of the seriousness of the country's condition, the spread of sudden alarm, the etc.), a certain worsening of the economic situation, which was not actually very significant but was enough to appear at that time as proof of the seriousness of the country's condition, the spread of sudden alarmism (we recall only the most significant examples relating to a possible 'forced' evacuation of Catania, Turin, Genoa, and Milan, the sending of children and young people up to the age of fifteen from southern Puglia to Portugal in anticipation of an enemy landing and an imminent devaluation of the lira and government bonds) and the increasingly widespread listening to Italian-language broadcasts on British and Swiss radio (considered by some to be 'the primary source' of 'oscillations' and 'doubts' 'in the popular consciousness')².

A gradual easing of tension began to occur only towards the end of February. The explanation given by the police was, on the one hand, that the "conscience of the people" had come to terms with the "new situation that had arisen" and, on the other hand, that the "inappropriate propaganda" that in the early months of the war, "systematically devaluing the enemy forces and extolling the power of our military equipment," had aroused "easy optimism," which suddenly turned into excessive

demoralization in the face of a reality that turned out to be completely different. From a

the tension that had arisen would diminish as soon as the military situation ^{improved}; t) the change that the military events in Greece and Libya (and these even more than those, since the defeat suffered in Africa was less conceivable, if only because of the extent of the retreat to which the Italian troops had been forced and the number of prisoners who had fallen into British hands, and could not be attributed, at least in part, to the inclement winter weather, as was attempted in the case of Greece) imposed a change on the way in which the press, radio, and, in general, the regime's propaganda apparatus had presented the war, the reasons why Italy had entered the war, its prospects, etc.; only in this context, we said, does the speech acquire its full meaning, can its *validity* be assessed, *and* can certain emphases and reticences be understood, which are not without value in better understanding both Mussolini's psychology and his *modus agendi*.

Mussolini's approach to ^{the speech}² was based entirely on three key concepts: that of "manly" frankness—partly deliberate, partly imposed on him by the need to take into account what everyone already knew thanks to British and Swiss radio broadcasts—in acknowledging the seriousness of the defeats suffered:

We call a spade a spade, and when the enemy wins a battle, it is useless and ridiculous to try, as the British do in their immeasurable hypocrisy, to deny or minimize it.

An entire army, the Tenth, was almost completely wiped out, along with its men and cannons. The Fifth Air Force was almost literally sacrificed. Where possible, resistance was fierce and sometimes furious.

Since we acknowledge this, it is pointless for the enemy to inflate the figures of their spoils.

that of absolute faith in spiritual strength, in the "national maturity" and resilience of the Italian people:

The events of recent months have strengthened our resolve and must intensify our cold, conscious, implacable hatred of the enemy, a hatred rooted in every heart, widespread in every home, which is an indispensable element for victory... Since November 11, when British torpedo bombers, taking off not from Greek bases but from an aircraft carrier, carried out the attack that we suffered in Taranto, the events of the war have been adverse. We must acknowledge this. We have had some dark days. And this is true of all wars. In all times.

Think of the Punic Wars. Cannae seems to crush Rome. But, at Zama, Rome destroys Carthage, erasing it from geography and history forever.

Our capacity for recovery, both morally and materially, is simply formidable and constitutes one of the distinctive characteristics of our race... It is utterly ridiculous to speculate on a possible moral collapse of the Italian people. This will never happen. Talking about separate peace is idiotic. Churchill has no idea of the spiritual strength of the Italian people and what fascism is capable of;

and, finally, that of certain final victory:

Especially in this war... it is the final battle that counts. It is certain that it will be a hard fight, and it is also very likely that it will be a long fight, but the final result will be victory for the Axis.

Great Britain cannot win the war. I will prove this to you with strict logical rigor. Here, the leap of faith is supported by fact. This demonstration starts from a dogmatic premise, namely that Italy, whatever happens, will march with Germany, side by side, until the end.

Those who are tempted to suppose otherwise forget that the alliance between Germany and Italy is not only between two armies or two diplomatic corps, but between two peoples and two revolutions, destined to leave their mark on the century... Germany's war potential has not only not diminished after seventeen months of war, but has increased enormously... German armaments are, in terms of quality and quantity, infinitely superior to those at the beginning of the war. Germany has not yet exhausted its human resources. Nor, for that matter, has Italy... Whereas in the World War Germany was isolated in Europe and in the world, today the Axis is the arbiter of the continent and is allied with Japan... Europe, therefore, with the exception of Portugal, Switzerland, and, for some time yet, Greece, is entirely outside Great Britain and against Great Britain.

This situation has led to a complete reversal of what happened in 1914-1918. At that time, the blockade was a terrible weapon in the hands of Great Britain; today it is a blunt weapon, because Great Britain has gone from being the blockader to being blockaded by the air and naval forces of the Axis, and will be increasingly blockaded until catastrophe strikes.

The morale of the Axis peoples is infinitely superior to that of the British people. The Axis is fighting in the certainty of victory, while Great Britain is fighting because, as Halifax said, it has no other choice...

Great Britain is alone. This isolation pushes it towards the United States, from which it desperately and urgently calls for help. The industrial potential of the United States is certainly enormous, but for the aid to be effective, supplies must: a) reach England safely; b) be of such magnitude as to not only compensate for the destruction that has occurred and will occur to Britain's industrial facilities, but also to establish superiority over Germany, which is impossible because the entire European continent is now working with Germany in terms of manpower, machinery, and raw materials.

When Great Britain falls, then the war will be over...

Set out in these three points, the speech concluded with a statement that deserves to be emphasized, as it shows how, at

Despite his conviction that the "psychological fluctuations" caused by individual war events were merely episodes of little importance, Mussolini was well aware of the seriousness of the "tension" that was troubling the country, and his speech was designed and constructed to calm it and restore confidence among Italians. Attentive to the slightest nuances, it is typical of him to refer to the distant and, for many, not easily understandable episode of Canne (which he followed, however, with that of Zama and the "forever" destruction of Carthage) and not to that of Caporetto, which was much closer and understandable to everyone but, precisely for this reason, more fraught with memories and negative echoes that he did not want to reawaken in any way; and ready to resort to any argument to achieve this, both those he was convinced of and those he believed in less, but which in those circumstances he was very willing to use freely to cheer up the Italians and make victory seem a sure goal, which they had to strive for, not least because of the material advantages they would gain from it. Anything can be said, but not that Mussolini thought that the Italians were facing the ordeal of war in an exemplary manner and that for this reason alone they deserved victory. The complaints and outbursts on this subject preserved in Ciano's diary are more than enough to prove it. Yet, at the end of his speech, he did not fail to strike this chord: "The Italian people, the Fascist people, deserve and will have victory... The privations, sufferings, and sacrifices that are being faced with courage and dignity that can truly be described as exemplary by almost all Italians, men and women alike, will be rewarded." Other passages in the speech that are also worth highlighting are those relating to the operations in North Africa, to which Mussolini devoted a great deal of space, unlike those against Greece (to which he referred almost *en passant* only to praise the behavior of the division

"Julia" and ensure that, with the favorable season in spring, "the good") most likely because the defeat suffered by a military leader such as Oraziani, considered by all, along with Badoglio, to be highly capable, played into his hands in attributing all responsibility to the military and indirectly countering those who blamed Badoglio's removal from the Supreme Command considering it a ploy to relieve the politicians and Mussolini himself of all responsibility.

to dispel the belief that was beginning to take hold among many that if England found itself on the ropes, the United States would enter the war to help it and, even more so, any fear that Berlin and Rome might actually want to involve them in ^{the conflict}; and the one with which the "Duce" tried to present in the least humiliating light for Italy the aid ("cooperation") he had had to ask Germany for and the presence of German troops on national soil, whose behavior was already beginning to cause discontent among the population.

Nor should it be forgotten that Mussolini's speech, although at times a very personal expression of his concerns and his way of conceiving and dealing with the country, was delivered more than two months after Pavolini had intervened to rectify the tone and direction of the press, radio, and, in general, the ^{regime's} propaganda.

From October 1, 1937, to January 31, 1941, fourteen thousand officers and 396,358 soldiers were sent to Libya, and two armies were formed, the fifth and the tenth. The latter had ten divisions, including Italian and Libyan troops. During the same period, 1,924 cannons of all calibers were sent, many of them of recent construction and design, along with 15,386 machine guns and eleven million artillery shells.

100, 344,287, 265 rounds of ammunition for small arms; 127,877 tons of engineering materials; 24,000 tons of clothing and equipment; 779 tanks, including a number of heavy tanks; 9,584 various vehicles; 4,809 motor vehicles.

These figures show that the "preparation" of Libya's defense had been the subject of an effort that can be described as impressive...

It was between October and November that Great Britain gathered and deployed against us all of its imperial forces recruited on three continents and armed on the fourth, concentrating fifteen divisions and a considerable mass of armored vehicles in Egypt and launching them against our forces in Marmarica, which had the valiant and loyal Libyan divisions in the front line, but not very suitable for withstanding the impact of the enemy's machines. Thus, on December 9, the battle began five or ten days ahead of our preparations and, after about two months, led the enemy to Benghazi (MUSLINI, XXX, pp. 52 ff.).

¹ "To defeat the Axis, the armies of Great Britain would have to land on the continent, invade Germany and Italy, and defeat their armies, and no Englishman, however unbalanced and delirious from the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol, can even dream of this.

Let me say now that what is happening in the United States is one of the most colossal hoaxes in history.

An illusion and a lie underlie American interventionism: the illusion that the United States is still a democracy, when in fact it is a political-financial oligarchy dominated by Judaism through a personal form of dictatorship; the lie that the Axis powers want to attack America after Great Britain.

Neither Rome nor Berlin are hatching such fantastic plans. Such plans could only spring from a mad inclination. We are totalitarian, and we will remain so, but with our feet firmly on the ground (ibid., PP-57 ff.).

² "The cooperation offered by the Führer, which German air and armored divisions are implementing in the Mediterranean...

neo, it is simply proof that all fronts are common and that the effort is shared. The Germans know that Italy today bears the weight of a million British and Greek soldiers; of 1,500-2,000 aircraft; of as many tanks; of thousands of cannons; of at least 500,000 tons of military vessels.

Cooperation between the two armed forces is based on camaraderie, loyalty, and spontaneous solidarity. Let it be said to foreigners, who are always ready to engage in malicious defamation, that the conduct of German soldiers in Sicily and Libya is, in every respect, perfect, worthy of a strong army and a strong people, trained in strict discipline" (ibid., p. 55).

³ There is a lack of in-depth comprehensive studies in the press during the war years, and some essays dedicated to individual newspapers remain superficial in their analysis of the issues. For radio, see A. MONTICONE, *Il fascismo al microfono. Radio e politica in Italia (1924-1945)*, Rome 1978, pp. 177 ff.; on cinema and in particular

Since June, Pavolini—as we have said—had recommended not to underestimate the enemy militarily and not to give in to easy and excessive optimism. However, his advice fell on deaf ears: partly because of the habit of extolling the "successes" and "power" of fascism and the superiority of the Italian people over others, acquired over many years of rhetoric, and partly because no one wanted to appear inferior to their colleagues, partly because mocking the enemy, magnifying the fighting skills and preparation of the Italians, flaunting confidence in the final victory of the Axis and making every episode of war a great feat of arms, in short, riding the wave of the rhetoric and flattering the most basic sentiments, was easier, less dangerous, and personally more advantageous than striving to get to the heart of the matter, partly, finally, because Pavolini himself, faced with this behavior by *the mass media*, had not insisted on his recommendations and had soon ended up limiting his interventions almost exclusively to a series of instructions about which news items to emphasize or ignore. At the beginning of the operations against Greece he had once again recommended not to underestimate the enemy and not to indulge in easy optimism but the first signs of change in the way (and tone) of presenting the war events only appeared when the extreme gravity of the reactions throughout the country to the action on Taranto and the failure of the attack on Greece became evident. Faced with the decline in 'public spirit' and the growing discredit of the regime in early December, when operations in North Africa had also begun to take a turn that was clearly unfavorable to the Italian forces, the press and radio changed their tone, settling on a line that could be described as realistic-patriotic on the one hand and

In particular, there is a lack of in-depth studies on the LUCE newsreels covering the war period itself (i.e., not seen in relation to the subsequent neorealist cinema); the same applies to propaganda, both as a whole and at the political publicity level. For the coordination activities and general guidelines of the Ministry of Popular Culture, see the ever-useful P. V. CANNISTRARO, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media*, Bari.

* 975, PP. 160 ff., 218 ff., 257 ff., and 317 ff.

¹ Already in his "report to journalists" on November 2, Pavolini had recommended "to focus on Greece," unless truly important events occurred, "with calm" and to "absolutely avoid making assessments or reporting judgments, both in correspondence from abroad and in other ways, on the length or brevity of the campaign in Greece" (ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto*, b. 75, fasc. "Rapporti ai giornalisti," *sub data*).

² In his "report to journalists" on December 11, Pavolini even spoke of "a new quartarella" that was forming and that had to be countered not with "imbecilic optimism" but with "pride" (see *ibid.*, *sub data*).

³ One of the themes on which Pavolini insisted most was that of the "unity of the Italian people" who, "in this, as in all the difficult moments of their history, feel deeply the voice of their homeland." The press had to direct all its efforts in this direction: "And even this word Fatherland," he said in his report of December 13 (see *ibid.*, *sub data*), "it is not a bad thing that it should return to honor in our newspapers because, in fact, when times get tough, it is the word that touches the secret and profound spring of the race. So no controversy, no search for responsibility, which would be partly impossible, partly unjustified, and partly untimely. I already feel that beyond all these phenomena we discussed together in the last report, there is a recovery and a reaction in vast strata of the Italian people. A reaction that can be called patriotic, in which we must believe and on which, above all, we must leverage."

another of caution regarding both the developments of the operations in progress and the duration of the campaign in Greece and of the war itself.

¹ A rough outline of this new line can be reconstructed on the basis of the first part of the "report to journalists" given by Pavolini on December 21. In it (see ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto*, b. 75, fasc.

"Reports to journalists," *sub data*), we read:

About ten or fifteen days ago, our press took on a different tone from what it had maintained until then, or rather, it touched on certain topics and adopted certain tones that had been unusual for our press and our propaganda up to that point. Now this phase can be said to be over. This phase was mainly characterized by the following: the transition from a generally optimistic assessment of the progress of the war (which was not only justified but, I would say, imposed by the course of military operations up to that point—except for some exaggerations that some people fell into a n d which I have always deplored), from that tone, I repeat, which could not have been otherwise, to a different tone. A t a certain point, in fact, we were the first to invite Italians to make a realistic assessment of the war, without that misplaced optimism. At the same time, however, we tried to inspire a more confident certainty in the final victory. On the other hand, we made a few scattered attempts, so to speak, against t h e rumormongers a n d defeatists who seemed to be particularly prominent on certain days, especially in certain cities a n d certain social classes, in fairly large numbers. We therefore made an appeal, which was effective a n d has already had an impact, t o the patriotic spirit of the Italian people, reawakening that sense of patriotism that is necessary in the great moments of national life.

All this has achieved, as I said earlier, its results in the sense that a certain evolution is particularly noticeable in the provinces even more than in Rome, which, like all capitals, always has a particular characteristic...

Now, as regards our enemy with all its more or less imperial appendages, what is the persuasion we want to instill in the Italian people, what is the image we want to give Italians at this stage, at this moment? First of all, it is not a question of writing off this enemy, because that is not in our interest. Therefore, any approach that gives this impression should definitely be discarded. Such an approach would be truly counterproductive. With regard to the enemy, we must bear in mind two conflicting requirements, which must be tempered, a n d at their meeting point we must choose our line. On the one hand, we must not in any way diminish the perception of the power of the enemy we are fighting a n d who is fighting us; a global power and empire that we must not diminish in any way because this devalues us and all our efforts, as well as victory; a n d also because the affirmation of this power gives reason for the difficulties we are forced t o endure in certain periods. On the other hand, we must not lose sight o f the defeatability of this enemy because if we only offered a picture of impotence, people would say: why then are we in this mess? Conversely, the newspaper must demonstrate, with reasoning a n d facts a n d , above all, with words taken from the enemy's own mouth, what its weaknesses are: the counter-blockade of submarines, food a n d supply difficulties, the very dispersion of its forces t o which it is forced in the various theaters of battle, etc. All this is necessary because it gives a sense of the progress of the war a n d what we believe will lead to the enemy's defeat. But, I repeat, these are two requirements that must be balanced. So do not talk about the enemy as a sinking ship, because if England is a sinking ship, it is not clear why we are finding it so difficult to defeat it a n d why it continues t o cause us trouble.

Nor, on the other hand, should we underestimate the real difficulties England is facing as a result of the joint action of the Axis powers.

following the joint action of the Axis powers.

Internally, with regard to the Italian people, it is not a question of cajoling Italians in any way, shape, or form. Sometimes (and this is also part of the duty of propaganda) it is necessary to artificially create waves of opinion, but it should be understood that this is not the current situation. It is not a question of deceiving anyone in any way; Italians must be shown the reality of the situation. Therefore, without deviating from the overall truth of the war operations, we must continue t o reasonably maintain overall confidence in the course of the war and in the path we are following.

As far as living conditions are concerned, especially the food situation of the Italian people, here too there is no room for facile and generic optimism, because these difficulties clearly exist. Not only that, but it is not in our interest to underestimate them, because these are sacrifices that citizens are making for their country and they would prefer them to be recognized as such, rather than being covered up as something shameful. On the other hand, one point that can be emphasized is the comparative aspect, i.e., showing how things are in other countries, whether enemy, ally, or neutral, because if shared misery is not always half the joy, it is always part of the joy.

Essentially, everything I have mentioned so far means that sensational headlines and sensational approaches are not recommended at this time. Of course, everything I am telling you may change tomorrow morning if sensational events occur, but as things stand, it is better to maintain a calm, measured, reasoned tone, without becoming distressed in any way. I am telling you all this because everything that is done

flight. Even before Pavolini, like almost all ministers, was sent by Mussolini to the front in the second half of January and was therefore temporarily replaced at the helm of the Ministry of Popular Culture by Gaetano Polverelli (an experienced journalist, but much more attached than him to the traditional bureaucratic-rhetorical patterns of propaganda), this line would undergo some softening and some tweaking, the former aimed at avoiding further depressing morale and causing a psychosis of "Annibale is upon us," both the risk that, by insisting too much on attacks against "vociferators" and "defeatists," one might end up making people believe in the existence of widespread and active dissent, the latter aimed at comforting the spirits of Italians by insisting much more than in the past on the military power of "allied Germany" and on the increasingly close "cooperation" between Rome and Berlin in all fields. This was essentially the same line taken by Mussolini in his speech on February 23:

Even if done in good faith to paint a rosy picture or to put Italians' minds at ease that evening, if it is not based on truth, it always comes back to haunt you after a few days or months. So, it is fine to give prospects of victory based on reasoning, but when it comes to ongoing operations, it is important not to stray too far from the facts of what has actually happened. So much so that the enemy propaganda, which in the last two months has had as many arguments as it wanted to indulge in, has already erred on the side of excess, especially with regard to Albania. For about a month now, there has been talk of the possibility, then the necessity, and finally the certainty of throwing the Italians into the sea and conquering all of Albania, just as in Libya, where the enemy has already made the mistake of talking about driving the Italians out of Libya, marching on Tunis, etc., etc. We are happy to see the enemy propaganda deal with all these issues because at some point we will be able to bring them up and say: you claim to have won, but if these were your objectives, you have already shown that you have lost, and our resistance has already been a victory in itself.

¹ The press campaign against those who did not do "their duty" was particularly lively in November and December and, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees, involved the entire spectrum of national journalism, major newspapers, local newspapers, and youth publications (which reached the most violent tones). Already in December 13 Pavolini, who had initially encouraged her, decided it was best to rein her in. "Some things benefit from being repeated, others do not," he stated in his report that day. "Abroad, these things could be taken as evidence of an alleged division among the Italian people. As for the combatants, they... may get the impression that while they are fighting, there are those behind them who are arguing or disagreeing." In short, having warned the "defeatists" and "vociferous," and frightened the speculators, it was better not to generalize, to limit the controversy, attacks, and denunciations to specific individual cases and to the local and youth press (unknown and therefore not reported abroad) and instead to encourage a spirit of patriotic unity by accrediting (and not disturbing) the image of a country united and striving to overcome the difficult moment.

Once operations in Greece had concluded, when part of the local press and the university press in particular showed signs of wanting to continue the controversy, it began to focus its criticism on the "dysfunctions of internal life" and to talk about the need for the regime to decisively address a series of social problems without waiting for the end of the war. However, the attitude towards it changed rapidly, to the point of accusing it of offering pretextual arguments to enemy propaganda and depressing internal morale. Typical of this are two outbursts against it by Pavolini, who had previously supported, encouraged, and defended it against attacks by the most reactionary fascist circles and who, deep down, shared many of the criticisms and underlying motivations. The first was on September 27, 1941: "Enough with the preaching of the various Catos and Savonarolas who climb onto their soapboxes and rant against certain categories of citizens who, on the whole, are highly deserving"; the second on June 27, 1942: "There may well be some who speculate on those who fight, but their wings will be clipped in due course, if they are not already in jail. Therefore, such attitudes, which are demagogic and defeatist in their practical results, must always be clearly and decisively crushed and avoided" (see ACS, *Ministry of Popular Culture, Cabinet*, bb. 75, 76, 77, *sub dates*).

² The military events of the winter of 1940-41 also influenced political journalism and, in particular, the way it presented the conflict. Until then, this had been generically attributed mainly to the

Despite the gradual easing of tensions that began towards the end of February, at the beginning of the third decade of March, the "public spirit" was still very depressed.

"errors of Versailles" and, more in general, to the secular "arrogance" of the Anglo-Saxons, to their hegemony and to their privileges political and strategic suffocating not only of Italy and of Germany, but of Europe as a whole. From here the need for the countries of the Axis, to less than "resign themselves to a definitive and irrevocable British superiority," of claim with the war the their "freedom" and the right of their peoples to security, economic prosperity, and power.

In 1941, other explanations were added to this one, including two that are worth dwelling on for a moment. One (not new in itself, but which until then had generally been only a sort of subordinate theory within the larger one, and moreover put forward by only a few authors) argued that the war was necessary for Italy's future not only 'externally' but also 'internally'. According to this explanation, fascism had left a significant part of the capitalist system intact; war would complete what the fascist revolution had done so far, shortening the survival time of the capitalist system and hastening the realization of the fascist one: begun as an internal revolution, the struggle against the 'old world' had to, [Kr triumph completely, transforming itself into a "revolutionary war" both externally and internally. Another tended to attribute all responsibility for the war to England and, behind it, to the United States (which had been particularly targeted by fascist propaganda even before it entered the war) and to present the Axis powers as forced to accept it in order to survive. Very significant in this perspective is Giovanni Ansaldo's essay "Come si arrivò all'intervento" (How we came to intervene), which appeared in 1942 in the volume *Due anni di guerra (Two Years of War)* published by the Ministry of Popular Culture; a venue and even more so an author whose authority ruled out the possibility that the essay had not been commissioned from on high, by Ciano if not by Mussolini himself. In it, not only was it argued that the Axis had not wanted the outbreak of war, but—more importantly—the "Pact of Steel" itself was presented as Mussolini's last-ditch attempt (Ansaldo was referring to the Axis, but his argument leaves no doubt about his intention to distinguish the position of the 'Duce' from that of Hitler) to avoid war or, at least, to postpone it until 1942 and beyond; all this was supported, among other things, by the explicit recognition of Italy's military unpreparedness in 1939. Ansaldo wrote: "Our legionnaires had won in Spain, they had saved the cause of civilization there, and they were preparing to disembark and parade in arms; but the consequences of the long war effort sustained in Spain were felt in the consistency of our military resources. During three long years, we had sent just under two thousand pieces of artillery, almost a thousand aircraft, no less than two thousand machine guns, and no less than half a million complete sets of equipment to the Iberian Peninsula. In other words, we had borne the brunt of the logistical burden of the Spanish war against an enemy—the 'Reds'—who were supplied by half of Europe and for whom Anglo-Saxon and Russian factories worked in admirable harmony. Now all this material, sent to Spain, could either not return, or, if it did return, could certainly not be considered in very good condition for immediate use. To the figures for this material, thus lost or worn out in Spain, we must then add the figures for what we had had to send to the Empire, and what we had to continue to send there for the needs, so to speak, of ordinary administration. And so we arrive at an impressive complex of war resources, on which Italy could no longer count in the event of a sudden worsening of the situation in Europe. The Duce and the Italian people were well aware that they were now on a slippery slope leading to a major conflict, but they also felt that it was in Italy's interest to gain time in order to replenish what had been used in the Spanish war and to bring our level of preparedness to the highest possible point. This need was known and fully appreciated by Germany, which—at least in part—also felt it.

This led to the signing of the "Pact of Steel" in Milan in May 1939. Certainly. Because

This agreement, presented at the time by all the newspapers of the plutocracies as proof of Italian and German aggressive premeditation, was in fact quite the opposite; it was an extreme attempt by Mussolini and Hitler to put a *stop* to the Anglo-Saxon encirclement maneuvers. With it, the two leaders, publicly affirming the absolute and automatic solidarity of their respective countries, aimed to make the war *managers*, who were at work, think twice; they aimed to get them, concerned about what they were facing, to postpone their plans for aggression for a few seasons. At the heart of the "Pact of Steel" was the unspoken but vivid hope of being able to "grab" at least a couple more years of peace, and this character of the "Pact of Steel" is demonstrated by the fact, now known only to the moderately informed, that it did not provide for immediate armed solidarity with Italy, but only from 1942 onwards. This clarification is the best proof that the two Axis powers did not really want to attack anyone; they only aimed to achieve, through their agreement, a moral effect on the organizers of the war, and to disrupt and slow down their machinations" (ibid., pp. 78 ff.).

The unfortunate events involving our armed forces - according to a report dated March 24 in *Cultura Popolare*¹ - have ended up creating in the minds of the majority of the people an almost fatalistic feeling of indifference towards military affairs and deep irritation towards the regime. Many are now saying loudly that Italy has unfortunately lost the war and that the victory of the Axis will be purely due to Germany, which will make us pay dearly for its triumph. People are irritated with the regime because, they say, Italy has played a much smaller role in this war than in the last world war, where our army behaved admirably and was a serious determining factor in the victory of the Allies. Now, however, the organizations created or reformed by the regime have revealed their failure when put to the test. No new consciousness has been created, some say, because in practice our forces have shown and would show little fighting spirit; because our armed forces would have been brought into the war with a frightening lack of preparation and resources; because command posts would have been given not to people of real value, but to scheming social climbers and often vulgar profiteers; that the disorder and profiteering that exist today in the field of food and rationing would be scandalous... Today, more than ever, we hear violent criticism of leaders who have become fabulously wealthy and that the frenzy of enrichment has never been so blatant in Italy...

Although the general mood was one of depression, there were cases—limited, but still more numerous than in the early months of the war—of rumors, graffiti, the distribution by mail of writings hostile to the regime and the war, subversive songs, etc., as well as the reorganization or formation of small groups of a more political nature. All facts that show how discontent and irritation were not always passive, even if the general depression and the widespread belief that Germany would win the war reduced to a minimum the possibilities for action and proselytism of those very few old anti-fascist militants and intellectuals who unsuccessfully tried to politicize discontent, but almost always ended up being quickly identified and arrested, most often amid general indifference.

In order for the "public spirit" to emerge from its torpor and begin to articulate itself in a series of reactions, it took Rommel's initial successes in Libya at the end of March and, above all, the lightning-fast liquidation of Yugoslavia and Greece the following month, with the occupation of Crete in early May as an appendix. Among the working classes (among whom there had also been a certain increase in cases of self-harm in the previous months - until then very rare - in order to avoid military service) these events often gave rise to widespread expectations of an imminent end to the conflict, made even more confident, especially among the peasantry, by the equally widespread conviction that the Vatican was 'working intensively' to this end. Other sectors of the country, especially the bourgeoisie, moved almost seamlessly from annihilation and depression to a state of enthusiasm and sometimes outright euphoria, so much so that in mid-May, the American ambassador in Rome, Phillips, wrote to Roosevelt that "the Italians are once again confident of final victory." Alongside the majority carried away by enthusiasm for the "victories of the Axis," there were certainly many who realized that the real and only winners were the Germans, who felt "in these German victories the reconfirmation of our absolute military inferiority, which emerges even more painfully from the comparison" and feared the consequences. However, the prevailing belief was that the end of the war (unless the United States intervened, which would have made it even longer and more difficult, but which most considered unlikely, trusting in the idea that the Americans did not want war with Japan) was now a matter of months, so much so that Pavolini, fearing that, given this widespread belief, a longer than expected war could lead to disappointment following the euphoria, on April 29, as soon as he returned to Rome, he had to recommend to the press

pa not to "harbor any illusions about the brevity of the conflict, which is absolutely unpredictable."¹ Nor, finally, were there those for whom the narrow escape reawakened dreams and appetites (especially with regard to Dalmatia²) that were not only disproportionate but also counterproductive, as they increased German irritation and contempt towards Italy and the hostility of the populations of the areas assigned to Italian occupation, and provided valuable arguments for British propaganda.

It is more difficult to say whether and to what extent this revival of the "public spirit" benefited the regime. Police and Carabinieri reports are sometimes contradictory and vague in this regard; ultimately, however, the impression one gets is that attitudes toward the regime did not undergo any significant changes, except - but we will return to this later - that intransigent and youthful fascism, which drew new vigor from the overcoming of the military crisis and the easing of internal tensions, to call for a renewal of the leadership of the PNF and the state and new, more decisive political and social policies. Nor, for that matter, did the regime have time to try to exploit the improvement in the situation and get back on track. The German attack on the Soviet Union in June first slowed down the recovery, then - with hopes of a new lightning German victory fading and a second winter of war approaching, plunged the vast majority of the country back into a state of fatalistic passivity in the face of everything, only exacerbating the never-dormant concerns and discontent over food restrictions and the high cost of living, the authorities' inability to combat the black market and hoarding, bureaucratic dysfunction, and corruption. Faced with a war whose final outcome and, above all, duration were increasingly difficult to predict, in the eyes of a growing number of Italians, everything else began to lose importance or, at least, to take a back seat to the problems of everyday life.

This explains the lesser interest and emotional involvement with which some Italians now followed and experienced the military events in North Africa (the British counteroffensive in November-December-December and the new Italian-German offensive in January-February) compared to those on the Russian front, which were understood to determine the fate and duration of the war, and even compared to those in distant East Africa, which, although understood to have little impact on the overall course of the war, nevertheless reawakened memories, hopes, and recent dreams that had not yet faded.

Hence, once again, the explanation—much more than mere police repression *tout court*—for the rapid decline of what little ferment and activism there was, of that "intensified subversive propaganda," which, although unable to find forms of aggregation, proselytism, and effective connections, had initially alarmed the regime's repressive apparatus and led it to exercise "particular vigilance." These had been sparked by the attack on the USSR in a certain number of militants (and especially former militants who had been "dormant" until then) and small (generally spontaneous) groups of anti-fascists and "subversives" in general. Significant in this regard is the trend in "subversive demonstrations" as reported in the monthly memos from the Carabinieri to the "Duce." In December 1940, there were 89; in January and February 1941, 133 and 142; in March-May, in the wake of the liquidation of the Greek regime and the occupation of Yugoslavia, they fell to 116, 80, and then even 58; with the attack on the USSR, they began to rise again: 86 in June, 98 in July, 114 in August, 119 in September; but then they began to decline again, reaching 70 and 77 in January and February 1942. The growing resistance encountered by the Germans in Russia and the failure of their plans to take Moscow and Leningrad before the winter lull in operations and - especially at the lower social levels - even the extension of the conflict to the United States, instead of giving them new impetus, resulted in fact in just as many reasons for discouragement and passivity: as hopes for a quick end to the war faded and gave way to an increasingly widespread state of resignation, apathy, and fatalism, which, on the one hand, flattened and often swallowed everything ("with regard to the war," the Carabinieri reported at the end of December for Rome, but the observation applies to the whole country, "a worrying absenteeism is spreading among the masses, which means that reactions to favorable or unfavorable events are very limited") and, on the other hand, made everyday problems the pivot around which everything revolved and was consumed, and even most of the anti-fascist ferment produced by the attack on the USSR burned out like a candle lacking the oxygen to burn. And if the number of 'subversive demonstrations' - a sort of tip of the iceberg of the "public spirit" - would begin to rise again in March (188), April (208) and May (245), and with it those of "direct news and depressing the spirit of resistance and national cohesion"² and criticism of the inefficiency of the

the state apparatus and, therefore, the measures that were adopted to deal with the situation (increasingly considered useless) \ this would not have depended on an actual change in political attitude, but above all on the worsening of the economic situation (increase in inflation and prices, scarcity and irregularity of supplies, reduction in bread rations: increasing evasion of rent controls, etc.) which made every

savings accounts at credit institutions and post offices, confiscation of jewelry and gold - advice to invest money in real estate and purchases of stable value items - catastrophic predictions for the coming winter, given the shortage and high cost of fuel and food rationing restrictions: there is particular concern that children will suffer from cold and poor nutrition

- Alleged parachute drops by British forces in Varzi (Pavia), Basigliano (Udine), and Castiglione (Catania) - Planned landing of British forces in Sferracavallo (Palermo) - Panic in Sicily due to aerial bombardments: mass exodus from cities to the countryside - Gradual repatriation of the civilian population of Tripolitania - British submarine activity off the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic coasts: an oil tanker reportedly sunk off Ortona and Mare (Chieti) - Malaria epidemic in Sardinia.

Six months later, in the annex to Rome to the "memorandum for the Duce" relating to April 1942, the Carabinieri wrote that they referred "essentially to the economic situation of the nation, which is represented as being close to exhausting its food reserves; the significant erosion of the military and economic power of allied Germany; and the alleged incompetence and presumed lack of responsibility of political and governmental authorities with regard to the nation's economic and social problems."

¹ The following is characteristic of what is written in the annex on the province of Naples in the "memo for the Duce" relating to May 1942:

Public opinion regarding general government measures continues to be rather skeptical and indifferent.

Among the masses, the Party and the Regime are increasingly debated; measures and decisions are met with indifference because people are convinced that the good intentions behind them are undermined by poor implementation resulting from inadequate organization and preparation. For example, measures relating to agricultural labor are thought to be unlikely to yield results because there is no confidence in the work of municipal commissions; the same applies to measures relating to cultivation plans.

Certain forms of propaganda are viewed with particular skepticism, such as those that assert the stability of our agricultural situation and the soundness of our finances.

Numerous reports by informants from the Ministry of Popular Culture, especially in Rome, are devoted to the negative repercussions caused by the reduction in bread rations:

March 9, 1942: "With

March 1942: "Slowly but steadily, complaints about food shortages and insufficient rations are on the rise. Often, much more often than before, these complaints are tinged with anger and exasperation. The general exclamations of protest of the past have given way to angry statements about what cannot be found, what is impossible to buy because of high prices, and now it is not uncommon to hear people say 'we go to bed hungry at night' and other similar expressions."

March 18

March: "Discontent over the reduction in bread rations continues unabated. In fact, one could say that rather than diminishing, it has grown in intensity. More than the volume, it is above all the tone of the protests and complaints that has increased. There are reliable reports of workers refusing to work, of a few incidents and attempts to destroy machines in some workshops, of bread carriers being robbed by women or students, and of bakeries having to close their shutters in the face of the threatening attitude of the crowd of shoppers."

March 20

: "The unrest over bread remains unchanged. From the day the reduction was announced to the day it was implemented, people have done nothing but protest, sometimes even loudly, so that today the opposition to the measure is as intense as it was then."

The unrest remains at a constant level of intensity, perhaps because it is fueled and fed by persistent rumors that in April the ration will be reduced to 100 grams. In this regard, decisive and murky resolutions are being made. The words "we will go to Piazza Venezia to ask for bread for our children" are heard very often.

The political repercussions of this mood of suffering and hostility among the masses are easy to guess (parallel to the above statement is another, namely that in Germany the bread ration is 600 grams per person), so that in the expressions used and the condemnatory judgments pronounced by the people, no one is spared.

The more difficult life became, the more painful the idea of a long war became. The dry bureaucratic tone of the Carabinieri's report on the situation in the province of Turin in March ¹⁹⁴² is extremely significant:

No anti-national demonstrations worthy of note. However, the number of anti-fascist graffiti that appear here and there at night, hastily scrawled, continues to increase. These graffiti denote greater impatience with the continuing conflict and the food restrictions it imposes.

The situation in Turin was not unique. In fact, the "memo for the Duce" for the same month contains the following assessment of the entire ^{national} situation:

Overall, it seems reasonable to conclude that, given the extent of the restrictive measures adopted in the food sector, the population has remained disciplined.

However, the masses are gradually being influenced by the deterioration of the economic situation, and their behavior must be monitored very carefully because, even if there is no reason to fear significant street protests at the moment, it is certain that there is widespread discontent among large sections of the Italian population due to the duration of the war and the restrictions they are forced to endure.

Looking at the overall picture, the situation does not appear to be alarming at present.

Even the numerous food restrictions imposed by the contingencies of war have been generally accepted with understanding.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that many categories of people have reached the limit of their possibilities and that further tightening could have dangerous repercussions on the spirit of the masses. Faced with growing shortages of goods, rising living costs, deprivation, etc., criticism of central and peripheral authorities is mounting, with increasingly vehement accusations that they have failed in the past to distribute the country's resources in a timely and equitable manner.

A source of deep disappointment is always the delay in the distribution of many rationed goods, so that consumers cannot even rely on the little that is promised to them.

There are therefore many who attribute the spread of the "black market" to this situation.

ro" to the fault of the very bodies responsible for procurement and distribution, while others even consider the phenomenon to be illegal speculation, but providential, in that it makes it possible to compensate for the failure to allocate other goods in a timely manner.

The same situation is reflected in the "memo" from the ^{following} April:

The internal situation continues to be characterized by widespread discontent, which, however, is not reaching alarming levels.

As food restrictions worsen, comments are polarized around the issue of supply, distribution, and prices, which the public still considers inadequate to meet current needs, without realizing that availability is what it is and that miracles cannot be performed in this area. In truth, however, it should be noted that delays in the distribution of goods are still frequent; that certain goods, such as potatoes, have been distributed in very small quantities or not at all; and that the prices of vegetables and other foodstuffs, which should supplement the limited allocations of rationed goods, have reached very high levels that are often inaccessible to poor people. Another reason for widespread discontent is the so-called black market, which, despite the strict measures adopted, continues to exist, albeit to a slightly lesser extent. In this regard, there have been signs that hoarders, faced with greater risks, are increasing their demands, reducing their customer base, but nevertheless continuing their activities with advantageous results. In Naples, there have been reports that pasta is being sold on the black market for up to 30 lire per kg, rice for 28, lamb for 36, butter for 90, and potatoes for aioli.

The severe sentences imposed on genuine speculators by the Special Court for the Defense of the State and by various other courts were therefore welcomed with great enthusiasm, especially by the masses.

On the other hand, discontent tends to increase due to the repression of minor food supply violations committed without any intention of hoarding, but only for the benefit of often large families.

Hence the conclusion on the state of the "public spirit":

Worthy of careful consideration because of the widespread—albeit latent—disappointment with the prolongation of the war and the consequent worsening of the economic and food situation. Criticism and murmurs of discontent were particularly widespread, expressed in hushed tones and accompanied by a sense of uncertainty about the outcome of the struggle.

This conclusion is also found in the 'memo' for the month of May ('the mood of the masses appears depressed due to serious concerns arising from the prolongation of the war and the worsening food situation'), with the addition of an observation - 'the anticipation of the next events of the war is very keen, also because many believe they may be decisive for the outcome of the war'².

It is worth dwelling on this point for a moment, since in a certain sense it anticipates the double shift that occurred in the months immediately following. First, however, it is necessary to clarify the attitude of Catholics and, in particular, the significance that the extension of the conflict to the Soviet Union had for them. This is all the more important because their attitude can only be truly understood if it is seen as part of the overall evolution of the 'public spirit', but at the same time as a component – a n d certainly not one of the least important – of that evolution.

When the Germans attacked the USSR, the Holy See immediately set about reorganizing religious life in Soviet territories with a Catholic presence, sending ^{priests}¹ to follow in the wake of Italian and Hungarian troops. The Vatican, however, rejected both Italian a n d German pressure to solemnly reaffirm its condemnation of Bolshevism ("If I speak, " Pius XII said to Attolico in September " about Bolshevism, should I not then say anything about Nazism? ... If one day I 'have to' speak, I will speak, but I will say everything") a n d thus bless the "crusade." ("I see the crusade, but I do not see t h e crusaders" was Monsignor Tardini's first significant reply to Councillor Babuscio Rizzo, who had mentioned the issue to him³ as well as British a n d , above all, American pressure to affirm that Nazism was more dangerous to humanity than Bolshevism a n d that t h e Soviets had restored religious freedom⁴

This formally neutral stance of the Holy See—which was well aware that, if he won, Hitler would not fail to carry out his anti-religious program a n d , therefore, hoped, in the words of Monsignor Tardini, for a defeat of the USSR a n d thus an extreme weakening of Germany that would also allow for its defeat and a conclusion to the conflict on democratic grounds⁵ – the diverse and varied Italian "Catholic world" certainly did not follow suit. Especially in the early months, the Catholic press, both the most authoritative and widely read (*Civiltà Cattolica*, *L'Italia*, *L'Avvenire*) and the smaller publications (*Italia e Fede*, *L'Amico del Clero*, *Credere*, *Voce Coritana*),

the people and the Soviet soldiers themselves, who were engaged in a war for survival, and which the same fascist sources suggested was being conducted by the Germans (and soon also by the Soviets) with unprecedented ruthlessness; *b*) growing hostility towards the Germans and their policy towards the Catholic Church; *c*) mounting tension "pacifist," from a growing desire for the war to end, a desire that, especially at the grassroots level, was often one and the same with a refusal to *hate* _f as fascism preached, the enemy (individually guilty) and above all with the conviction that the Pope was the only one who could say to the belligerents "the definitive word of truth, justice, and fairness" and act as arbiter and peacemaker between ^{them}.² Ultimately, therefore, the person who best understood the significance of the extension of the conflict to the USSR for the attitude of Catholics was R. Moro,³ when he emphasized how

Faced with the Nazi-Fascist war against the USSR, Catholics expressed, on the one hand, a general anti-communist attitude, satisfied by German victories in Russia (significant in this sense, for example, is a statement by De Gasperi expressing satisfaction at the possible fall of Moscow) and, on the other hand, at least in part, a certain skepticism (though there were exceptions) about the reality of a Nazi-led "crusade" and, then, the hope that both the Soviets and the Nazis would be worn down in a confrontation that would give Catholic Europe room to breathe.

It is only from this point onwards that the contours begin to become clearer, dap-

first vague, then gradually more precise, of a turning point. At first, this was heralded exclusively by the tolerance and space gained by the most intransigent positions towards the regime in a series of Catholic initiatives and demonstrations: the debate on "optimism" and "pessimism" that began between *L'Osservatore Romano* and *Azione Fucina* in the summer of 1941, the conference of "Catholic writers" held in the same period, the famous week of conferences in Florence at S. Marco in November with the participation of Mazzolani and P. Bozzetti, the launch in the fall by the Men of AC and the Graduates Movement of courses and lecture series on "Christian sociology." The evolution was then made clear with the papal message of Christmas 1941 on the "international order." And it was the American intervention, even before the military reversals in Africa and Russia in 1942 or the bombing of the cities of the North, that introduced the most important change in Catholic attitudes, suggesting that the prospect of at least a compromise peace was now almost certain, and no longer the unchallenged dominance of the Axis.

Much could be said about the terms, timing, and details of the change described by R. Moro. For the purposes of our discussion, however, one point seems particularly worth clarifying: although it affected the entire "Catholic world" to some extent, the change manifested itself in very different ways depending on the various realities involved and therefore had a different impact on the "public spirit" in different ways and to different degrees. The main protagonists and participants were increasingly large sectors of the clergy and, with them, organized Catholics and, more generally, those with a strong religious sense. This was true whether they were intellectuals or ordinary people, bourgeois or peasants, although it is necessary to bear in mind - despite the difficulties and risks inherent in any attempt to distinguish the impact of different components on such complex collective processes - the influence of the environment in general and the deterioration of living conditions: it is certainly no coincidence that it only came to fruition - according to Moro's reconstruction - in the summer of 1942, neither before nor after the more general turning point reached by a large part of the country.

If he was referring to these sectors, Mussolini, from his point of view, was certainly not wrong when, speaking on January 3, 1942, to the national leadership of the PNF, he lashed out against them and called on the party to exercise particular vigilance and "educational" and "disciplinary" action against them:

The Italian people as a whole, he said, are healthy and strong and are beginning to have an increasingly firm sense of the gravity of the heated contest between nations; the conflict that is spreading in space is also extending in time.

However, there are harmful and deleterious rates that must be stopped

Our attention. Currents within the Catholic world oppose the Axis. No voice of sympathy has yet been raised by the high clergy in favor of this people who are fighting the Anglicans of England and America, the Bolsheviks and the godless of Russia. Moreover, pacifism is preached: wage war without hating the enemy.

And even if, as was his nature, he exaggerated the situation, Farinacci was not wrong when, writing ^{to Mussolini} on November 19, 1942, he stated that the clergy, "with a few rare exceptions, is hostile to us." Nor is it surprising that, given this assessment of the clergy's attitude, as early as May of that same year, the Ministry of the Interior felt the need to ask all prefects for information on Catholic Action and, in particular, whether it was attempting to attract young people to Catholic organizations. This was despite the fact that just a month earlier the police while reporting that "in recent months" there had been a "certain resurgence" of organized subversive and anti-fascist activity, had observed that in

In the Catholic sphere, the clergy continues to carry out its ministry of moral assistance and healthy patriotic propaganda. While prayers are said in churches for our victory, the highest Catholic circles react to any form of misguided pietism that tends to transform the generous sacrifice of the purest dedication to the homeland into sterile and debilitating lamentation. This observation is not invalidated by sporadic and negligible episodes of inappropriateness, which are severely punished, even if they originate not so much from genuine bad faith as from an excess of zeal.

However, if we broaden our horizons to the rest of the "Catholic world," the reality appears different. Here, the path toward change was much slower, uncertain, sometimes tortuous, and did not always lead to a real outcome. And we are not referring so much to the various types of fascist Catholics, whether they were Papini or T. Olivelli, D. Del Bo, E. Massi, etc., but above all to national Catholicism, which constituted "the most substantial and influential part of the organized Catholic 'world'" and which, for the most part, did not deviate until the end from the line on which - as we have already said - it had taken a stand in June 1940. A line of "national loyalty," of "sense of responsibility and duty" towards the homeland at war and of obedience to authority, to the point of religious and moral refusal to shirk the duty of human solidarity, to pain and to a common destiny with the presumption of being able to

judge whether the war fought by Italy was just or not.¹ A line that Moro has reconstructed, with balance and finesse, in his main motivations and manifestations.²

This line accompanied the appeal to the universal and anti-war values of Church doctrine with substantial recognition of Italian reasons and appeared to be essentially dominated by the political problem of the Catholic presence, that is, the need to guarantee the regime its loyalty and, if anything, to present Catholics as a component of the regime itself, with its peculiarities and demands. In this context, the solidarity that, according to the indications of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, Catholics were to offer the country took on a broader meaning: it was not just a matter of keeping dissent quiet and offering generous charity, but above all of trusting in Italy's mission and victory. This position, characterized by a strong nationalistic patriotism, was followed by the main Catholic newspapers, from

p. Gemelli and the magazines of the University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, as well as the mass branches of the ACI, although this occurred with different nuances that characterized, for example, the position of the Catholic Men and the GIAC in a rather pro-monarchist direction, animated by a more "civic" than nationalistic patriotism.

Nor, on closer inspection, were various members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy very far from this line of thinking. Two examples, despite their differences (both in terms of the intellectual stature of the two and the nature of the documentation to which we refer), are those of the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Ildefonso Schuster, and Monsignor Angelo Roncalli, then nuncio to Turkey. The former is remembered for his speech to the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre on the thirteenth anniversary of the Conciliation and his pastoral letter "Against those who spread false news about the war," published on November 21, 1942, at a time much more difficult for Italy and Milan (which had become a target of Allied bombing), but also for the Church, which was increasingly accused by the Fascists of "absenteeism" or "favoritism towards the enemy," but was now also targeted by some anti-Fascist sectors who more or less explicitly accused the Pope of wanting the war. The tone of both³ is certainly not that of other episcopal documents of those months which were clearly Catholic-nationalist in nature⁴ nor do they lack ac-

critical remarks about fascism and even more so about the Axis. However, in our opinion, these remarks are not enough to dispel two doubts: one concerning Schuster's intimate adherence to them, the other concerning the possibility that they could be easily understood by everyone. Typical, in the case of the speech of February 11, is this passage, which, in our opinion, was probably most understood by listeners, and even more so by those who learned of it through press reports, must have been the prelate's certainty of Italian victory and divine protection:

Today, together with the anniversary of that fateful date, we also celebrate the eve of another celebration, that of victory, which, however, in order to be definitive, we hope will be such as to satisfy the rights, honor, and dignity of all. It is certainly difficult to resolve the conflict that today divides the different interests of so many peoples, but Mary will help us achieve this victory too: the feast of February 1, 1929, is a pledge of this. But one condition is necessary: we will win if we have God with us, and we will have Him with us if we too take His side.

For Monsignor Roncalli, we can refer above all to a different type of documentation, but one that in a certain sense is even more significant, because it leaves no doubt about the sincerity or instrumentality of certain of his positions: his letters to his family. When Italy entered the war, the future pontiff—who had initially hoped it would remain neutral—thought that it would bring "blessings and prosperity to our beloved country." Of course, there would be suffering, but

it is clear, he wrote to his sisters and brothers in August 1940², that the Lord looks upon our Italy with particular kindness, and this precisely

To count ourselves among the stateless would be a gross mistake. At the threshold of the family, a larger family opens up for us too, our homeland: and we know that we must love it, and we do love it with a passion equal to the greatness of its concept. The homeland is a great thing. Jesus loved Galilee, he loved his people... We Christians must love our homeland. We Italians, in particular, must love this blessed land where we were born, where God made the purest part of his sky shine, and where he placed the undisputed center of truth, faith, and love. We must love our homeland with a feeling that can be both ecstasy and martyrdom, the more our enthusiasm vibrates to the point of offering a dedication. Dedication that is renunciation of life for the soldier who dies on the battlefield in the mystery of inglorious pain, which is renunciation for desolate mothers, wives who have become widows, and children who have been made orphans.

¹ See P. BELTRAME-QUATTROCCHI, *Al di sopra dei gagliardetti* cit., p. 293. In the pastoral letter of November 21, 1942, the critical passages are certainly more numerous and explicit, and there is a certain greater distancing (the Church is not responsible for the war, the Pope did everything he could to avoid it; the Church does not engage in politics but has not distanced itself from the war and has worked and continues to work tirelessly to help combatants at the front, populations, prisoners, and 'in the hour of trial' has not failed in its mission). However, it is difficult to understand how sincere and how instrumental this is, and it ultimately remains ambiguous: 'Is the Church uninvolved in the war? But those who say this are either disingenuous or living in a dream world. Of course, it is not for priests to pass judgment on war, just as it is not for private individuals, including priests, who must obey the laws of their country...' (ibid., pp. 295 ff.).

² GIOVANNI XXII, *Letters to family members 1901-1962*, edited by F. L. Capovilla, Rome 1968, I, p. 512 (August-October 1940).

In May 1942, all sources indicate that the mood was more depressed than ever before. "Subversive demonstrations" were on the rise, but what caused the authorities the most concern was the fact that, for the first time since Italy had entered the war, the widespread depression, growing discontent with the economic situation, the increasingly widespread sense of fatigue due to the prolonged war, and the ever-growing desire for peace, there was now "a state of mind that has all the characteristics of contingency and is highly sensitive to any external stimulus, both positive and negative: " which made them fear that discontent could take on political overtones. In the following two months, however, the situation was reversed, most markedly among the middle classes

even more marked than in the aftermath of the occupation of Greece and Yugoslavia.

Until May-June, among the still sparse groups of old liberal-democratic anti-fascists and the intellectuals associated with them, there was a certain ^{optimism}, along with the most disparate rumors about a possible imminent crisis of the regime (among other things, there were whispers of contacts between the sovereign and Badoglio, Caviglia, and even a mysterious Cardinal Della Chiesa), so much so that some had even considered the possibility of forming some kind of organization. One need only glance through Calamandrei's diary to realize how strong—despite their confidence in the United States—the backlash was on them following the unexpected reversal of the military situation in Africa. With the fall of Tobruk, even for them the possibility of a "march to Suez" was no longer implausible, and with it nothing could be ruled out *a priori*, not even the victory of the Tripartite. This led to growing pessimism among most of them, a feeling of increasing alienation in their own country, with some taking refuge in the 'power of optimism' and others placing their hopes not so much in the Americans (whose enormous potential, not only economic and industrial but also military, even the anti-fascists were generally unaware of) as in the Soviets.

The enthusiasm and hopes of Italians in general reached their peak in the second half of June and the first ten days of July, although there were already signs of a decline in tension in the last days of July, before the British definitively blocked the Italian-German forces stationed in front of El Alamein. The reports of the police, the Carabinieri, the censorship services, and even more so those of the informants of the Ministry of Popular Culture (the least coldly bureaucratic and, therefore, more revealing of a state of mind shared by their authors) are eloquent. Here are some examples taken from the reports of the Ministry of Popular Culture:

June 17:

For two days now, people have been breathing with their chests puffed out, looking more confident and determined, feeling like somebody.

This is not literature or rhetoric: the latest Italian bulletins, especially the extraordinary ones, have injected a sense of importance and pride. The superb exploits of our soldiers in the air, at sea, and on land, which took place almost simultaneously, have produced such a sense of satisfaction at first, and then enthusiasm and elation, that it is hard to believe.

People are indeed breathing easier, more freely, with a decisive and busy attitude: today there is the certainty of being worth something, of being and counting for something in the world, of being able to count even more tomorrow when the time comes, of finally being protagonists. The feeling of inferiority that many felt and that kept most people in awe, humiliating and diminishing every manly and proud feeling of the Italian spirit, has suddenly disappeared, the feeling that Italy was a mere extra on the great stage of war, a pawn manipulated by others. For two days now, this feeling has been fading, replaced by a prouder and more dignified one that Italy, not as a supporting actor but as a protagonist of rank and great possibilities, is playing its part.

June 19:

If the news from the Marmaric front continues to be good, within a few days—along with the conviction that the government is now truly working to improve the food situation of the population—there will be an almost radical reversal of the general attitude of the masses toward the war and the regime.

June 24:

The masses have not yet recovered from the surprise of Tobruk. The lightning conquest of the stronghold continues to be the subject of all conversations and, with it, the serious British defeat holds the attention and interest of the general public. Naturally, the comments are enthusiastic and the public spirit is marked by the most rosy optimism.

National pride, long hidden or disappointed due to the apparent uncertainty of our operations, has resurfaced vehemently, finding every excuse to manifest itself and spread. Discussions focus solely on Italian soldiers, Italian officers, Italian command, Italian valor, and Italian resistance, and it is a widely held belief, expressed and affirmed at every opportunity, that only with soldiers like ours could such a resounding success have been achieved against such a powerfully armed and entrenched enemy...

June 26:

The actions of the government, the regime, and its most representative figures are definitely on the rise.

The effect of the improved food situation and recent military victories is clearly visible: spirits are calmed and reassured, confidence is revived, and hopes are rekindled. In other words, a new atmosphere of liveliness and optimism has been created, one that had long been lost, of general satisfaction and pride; a restful feeling of protection and security for the present and the future.

June 28:

A panoramic view of the mood of the masses over the course of a month shows that it is not recognizable today compared to what it was a month ago. The recent military successes have contributed greatly to changing it for the better, but these would perhaps not have achieved the

that can be seen today if the ground had not been prepared by the first government measures that led to a marked improvement in the food situation.

July 1.

The morale of the population continues to rise: the succession of news of military successes in Africa—which is the sector that has the most direct and sensitive resonance in the spirit of the masses—acts as a springboard and gradually sweeps away all concerns... What is certain is that today people believe in victory as never before and feel that great events are unfolding and that these events will bring about a giant step towards the victorious conclusion of the conflict.

As soon as Rommel was forced to halt his advance at El Alamein, however, the optimism and enthusiasm faded. Within a couple of weeks, pessimism, fatigue, and mounting discontent returned to dominate the mood, fueled by events, marginal incidents, and contingencies that had caused less irritation in previous months (in Rome, the disappearance of shelling beans from local markets was "a cause for resentment and reproach," as was the scarcity of wine), not to mention the disappointment caused by the rapid dissolution of the improved economic situation and the hopes that a few weeks earlier had helped to lift spirits and—on the wave of enthusiasm for the advance in Egypt—to suggest that the war had taken a new turn.

The first signs of this new reversal in "public spirit" began to appear on July 7-8. An informative report on the situation in Rome dated July 8 already ^{states}:

The general mood is becoming gloomy again and morale is falling: things in the food sector are starting to go wrong, as they did a few months ago, and people are getting angry again, expressing their discontent, which is not limited to the food sector alone... The mood and morale of the masses are affected by disappointment and frustration at the unexpected halt to the advance of our soldiers in Egypt and at having to put aside the demonstrations of jubilation and admiration that would have been expressed for the conquest of Alexandria...

In the days that followed, the process intensified until it became almost universal and increasingly explicitly targeted the regime and Mussolini himself. In some major cities, such as Milan, Turin, and above all Rome, it became a source of serious concern for the authorities, who, unable to explain such a rapid and drastic change in mood, came to believe that it was being "orchestrated" by anti-fascists. Typical in this sense is a report on the situation in Rome dated July 1:

The abrupt halt of our soldiers just when their march seemed unstoppable and it appeared that the enemy had nothing left to oppose our momentum and our will, produced an even more abrupt decline in morale, exacerbated by other factors (food) that made the masses nervous and irritable. Subsequently, other causes and some unpleasant rumors accelerated this downward spiral. Today, the difference in warmth and mood between what it is and what it was a few days ago is remarkable.

It is said that our glorious Ariete division no longer exists, half destroyed, half captured. This rumor has caused a sense of pain and bitter disappointment. Of course, no one thinks or wants to believe that there is a huge exaggeration in this rumor. It is also said that the Duce was there, surrounded by a cohort of journalists assigned solely to him, waiting to enter Alexandria on a white horse at the head of the victorious troops. A lot of minute details have been circulated about the Duce's presence there during the days of crucial fighting for the fate of Alexandria and Egypt, all very finely crafted, but all biased.

It is clear that the aim is to impress people's imagination by portraying the Duce as animated and driven solely by excessive ambition and vainglory, concerned only with satisfying his own personal vanity, completely unconcerned with the fate or suffering of his soldiers, etc. This form of anti-Mussolini propaganda (which does not stop there, but finds other, more despicable methods and arguments, appealing to the simple minds of gullible people because it takes advantage of certain occasional coincidences), is being manipulated with obvious skill and effectiveness and is achieving conspicuous results, results that should be combated energetically and countered with others capable of achieving the opposite effect.

A week later, even German successes in Russia aroused little interest among the masses and were often a cause of further depression among the "patriotic" bourgeoisie. In the wake of this, rumors and hypotheses began to circulate that until a few months earlier would have been unthinkable or had found credence and consensus only among a few intellectuals of the fascist left, such as Ugo Spirito, who had long shown sympathy for the Soviet regime and dreamed of a "meeting" between fascism and communism on totalitarian and anti-capitalist bases, and which denote, in addition to growing disarray, a sort of adjustment of minds to accept any solution that would bring a "positive" outcome to the war, even if it conflicted with convictions that had until then been considered firm and unyielding. In a report dated July 17, for example, we read:

Nothing new on the internal spiritual front. The anticipation and hope of occupying Alexandria at any moment is slowly fading. Rumors that the Duce has returned to the Egyptian front to then enter the city at the head of the victorious troops, which would therefore suggest its imminent conquest, are unable to stop this hope from fading.

The confident optimism of a few days ago has been followed by a period of gloom and disappointment. And also indifference. You could almost say that this sense of disappointment is compounded by the frequent and numerous reports of German victories coming from the Russian front. Not having anything to counter these successes has always been, since we entered the war (this observation has been made many times by many people), a source of envy and depression.

Other rumors are circulating: Germany has offered Russia a deal between the two countries to put an end to the carnage and destruction; there is said to be strong disagreement between the German General Staff and German political leaders. The latter would like to break up European Russia and create a number of states in the German sphere of influence. This plan is strongly opposed by the General Staff, which would prefer a united and compact Russia, with which it would like to come to an understanding and form an alliance. A Germany supported by an allied Russia would truly be in a position to dictate terms to the whole world. This would be the concept of the General Staff, which has already asked political leaders twice to offer peace to Russia on favorable terms before the weight of America's war effort makes itself felt.

By the end of the month, most Italians had lost all trace of their Egyptian dreams; the "public spirit" was once again characterized by deep pessimism, a lack of prospects for the future, and growing concern about how to cope with a third winter of hardship and daily difficulties; with all that this entailed in terms of the mood towards the regime and the Germans, who were increasingly unpopular and the subject of multiple criticisms and open accusations: for not having adequately supported the offensive in Egypt, for their behavior towards Italian soldiers and commanders, for turning Italy into a "German colony" and, instead of meeting its needs, stripping it of everything. This is how, in early August, the Carabinieri summarized the situation in their "memorandum for the Duce" relating to July:

The initial successes achieved by the Axis in Marmarica and then in Egypt itself had sparked a wave of enthusiasm, rekindling hopes that these successes would herald the end of the conflict, but the stalemate that followed greatly demoralized the population.

Meanwhile, after two years of increasing deprivation and moral and material suffering, a keen desire for peace was creeping into the minds of the masses, who considered

They see war only as a source of pain and suffering and in no way as a solution to the problems that caused it.

Many people live in fatalistic anticipation of events, hoping that some higher or divine force will finally put an end to the current state of affairs.

This sense of weariness and passive resignation is influenced above all by the growing distrust that the people have for many—indeed, most—of the nation's leaders.

Apart from the mediocrity attributed to them, their integrity is questioned and a thorough purge is called for, seriously affecting all those who believe they can put their selfish private interests before those of the nation...

In general, however, the morale of the population is not a cause for concern at the moment, given that the military situation still leaves room for hope and the current season, on the whole, makes it less difficult to solve the food problem, although it is still considered very critical for the coming winter.

As can be seen, the Carabinieri (and the police were of the same opinion) did not consider the situation 'for the moment' to be "public spirit" such that there were fears it would evolve into a true political movement, on the other hand, clearly highlighted that this was due to only two factors: the overall military situation, which still gave cause for hope, and the good seasonal performance of agriculture, which made the ^{food} problem less difficult. If these two conditions had ceased to exist, "the home front" - as various peripheral police leaders reminded Senise immediately after the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa - "would inevitably have re-

And this is precisely what happened. At first, while the Italian-German forces remained stationed at El Alamein, at a relatively slow pace; then, when the British forced them to retreat towards Libya and began bombing the major Italian cities, and even more so when the Anglo-Americans landed in Morocco and

a kind of terror for what tomorrow will bring. Tomorrow is spoken of with a sense of bewilderment, of deep sorrow, as if the dire prediction of a military catastrophe were bound to come true.

False reports, also broadcast by enemy radio stations, that the Duce had been struck down by a serious illness, and news of the effects of recent air raids on some cities in northern Italy, have heightened this mood of concern and fear. People are saying a n d complaining that the country no longer has anyone to lead it, that disorder a n d corruption reign supreme, and that all the institutions of the regime have failed in their purpose due to the incompetence and dishonesty of the men who head them.

Old fascists insistently talk about the need to restore a healthy atmosphere to Italian political life, to get rid of profiteering leaders, and to bring fascism back to its original ideals, in view of the danger that looms over the nation. They would like to see new, honest, a n d wise men in power. The same people are also t a l k i n g — a n d this completely fantastical news is spreading in an alarming manner—about a conspiracy that Ministers Ciano, Bottai, a n d Grandi are plotting to oust the Duce and create a triumvirate, composed of themselves, to succeed him.

Some, however, take it for granted that there will be a military dictatorship and mention the name of a general whom the King is said to have chosen to entrust with the government of the country (ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General of Public Security, Private Secretariat of the Chief of Police, Senise*, b. 8, file 97).

In numerous reports, the "mass" listening to Radio London was taken for granted. "Radio London broadcasts," reported a report from Sardinia dated September 28 (*ibid.*, b . 7 , phase 89), " are now known to the entire public, are discussed a n d often commented on favorably, while t h e three weekly communiqués from 'Italia Libera' are not followed, at least for now, with excessive attention."

¹ The impact of the bombings on public morale was immediate and profound, not only in the areas directly hit, but also in neighboring areas and in places where displaced persons sought refuge (between October and December, approximately 300,000 people were forced to leave Genoa). Apart from the casualties and damage, t h e bombings caused further difficulties, both for those who could not leave the targeted cities but had to go t o work in other locations where, when possible, the most important factories had been transferred, and for the displaced persons, forced i n t o precarious accommodation in centers that were often ill-equipped to cope with such an influx of people, even in terms of food supplies, a n d not infrequently exposed to the most shady speculation. In the annex on the situation in Rome, the Carabinieri's 'memorandum to the Duce' for December 1942 reported, for example:

"The consequences of the recent bombings in northern Italy and Naples continue to have a direct impact on public sentiment.

The numerous refugees who have flocked to the capital have given a sense of what the mood must be like among the populations affected by enemy air raids.

These are the northern populations, who perhaps possess greater courage and determination than those in other regions, but nevertheless show clear signs of despondency.

The enemy has rightly insisted, and will perhaps insist even more in the future, on this form of weakening the people.

In order to enable even the less well-off population to leave the large urban centers, it would be necessary to vigorously combat all forms of excessive speculation and, perhaps, to stimulate that spirit of brotherhood which today appears to be

in Algeria, at an increasingly rapid pace³, although with different patterns depending on the economic situation of the various areas, the locations most targeted by bombing and where there were the most displaced persons, and, finally, the various social classes and groups.

Finally, a relatively separate case was that of organized Catholics or those who were more strongly influenced by the Church. Their elites, on the one hand, showed a tendency "to separate any responsibility from those who prepared and wanted the conflict" and, as far as possible, to argue with the Germans, particularly with regard to the "infernal hatred" that Goebbels wanted to be nurtured towards the enemy and which was also preached by many old and young fascists and by Mussolini himself. On the other hand, they often expressed "feelings of deep patriotism" (typical in this sense are various editorials by the editor of "L'avvenire d'Italia"

R. Manzini³)⁴. There was also general and total agreement with what the Pope said in his speeches and radio messages and with his exhortations for a "Christian" peace, with justice and respect for human dignity.

After two years, no defensive measures had been taken: it was said that the British flew their aircraft at very low altitude around Milan Cathedral to show that, although they could have attacked it, they respected the famous monument, and this without any of our aircraft taking off to counter them, even though it was still daylight.

The unfounded alarms that occurred in the northern provinces of this area, particularly in Piacenza, Reggio Emilia, and Parma, caused widespread panic, which can only be explained by the diminished moral resilience due to creeping mistrust in the competence of leaders, and physical resilience due to the undeniable repercussions on all organisms of incomplete nutrition" (ACS, *Min. Interior, Dir. Gen. P.S., Part. Secretariat of the Chief of Police, Senise, b. 8*, phase. 97). The second reads, among other things: "The refugees from the cities that were victims of recent enemy air raids have brought to this Zone the voice of their protest against the inadequacy of relief efforts, but even more so against the absence of any defense: There were loud complaints against the authorities in Milan, who were busy celebrating 'October 28' with normal ceremonies while, it was claimed, victims, perhaps still to be saved, were still lying under the rubble" (ibid., b. 8, phase 103). Almost all the reports from the cities under attack dwelled on the negative effects of the lack of defense against the bombings. The following report by the Carabinieri in the appendix on the situation in the province of Turin in the "memo for the Duce" for the month of October is representative of all the others: "The recent enemy air raids on northern Italy have also contributed to depressing the already shaken morale of the population, more because of the poor efficiency of the defense services than because of the painful losses among the civilian population.

The failure of our fighter planes to intervene was severely criticized, as none of them took off from any of the airports in the area, thus allowing enemy aircraft to roam undisturbed in broad daylight and even hunt down people with low-altitude strafing.

The subsequent reports in our newspapers of the shooting down of eleven enemy aircraft by the German defense forces increased the disappointment of the masses (ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943)*, b. 174, fase. 42).

¹ "The political situation," as reported on October 28 to Senise from Rome (ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, General Directorate of Public Security, Private Secretariat of the Chief of Police, Senise, b. 8*, phase 97), "is today, more than ever, obscure and fraught with threats.

Once again, that wave of pessimism and defeatism that was about to overwhelm the nation during the Greek campaign is resurfacing. Once again, distrust of the regime and the men who represent it is reappearing in a more pronounced form.

² ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General of Public Security, Division of General Affairs, 1942*, b. 76,

This "ambiguous," "anti-Axis," and "dangerously pacifist," if not downright "defeatist" attitude was criticized by uncompromising fascists who, deeply concerned about the growing revival of religiosity—often of a very basic kind—in large parts of ^{the} country, insisted that Mussolini take measures to bring the clergy "into line" ("it would be enough to take them head-on to force bishops and parish priests to change course," Farinacci wrote to him on November 19). All in all, however, this attitude of the Catholics, given the point to which things had come, ended up – whatever the intransigents might have thought – doing more good than harm to the regime: for the time being, it was in fact a factor of order and a barrier that prevented a more widespread collapse of the "public spirit." Significant in this regard are the observations on "Catholic activity" in the aforementioned "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of December 31, 1942-xxi," particularly those in the final paragraph:

The Catholic camp continues to give no cause for concern. The clergy, with the inevitable exceptions determined by individual intolerance, remains aware of the important mission it has to fulfill in these troubled times, carrying it out with serenity of spirit and sincerely supporting the work of the authorities.

The activities of Catholic organizations, strictly confined to religious matters, have intensified considerably and are attracting an ever-increasing number of followers. This fact, together with the growing spontaneity of the religious sentiment of the population, which turns to God as its supreme comfort and entrusts to Him the salvation of its loved ones in danger, has given rise to a hostile reaction, which has now taken its cue from the Pope's recent speech to argue that the essence of Catholic thought is based on dangerous pacifism, that by asserting a supposed need to reevaluate the human personality and its natural rights, it implicitly condemns totalitarian regimes, and that its reaction to so-called neo-paganism is a sign of an irreconcilable conflict with National Socialist Germany.

It may be that all this is not entirely unfounded; however, it is only an ideal expression for the moment, while the advantages of this resurgence of religious sentiment are real from a political point of view, taking the form above all of a great strength of resignation to overcome hardship and endure the tragic consequences of war.

At the end of December, the picture that emerges from the rich and unambiguous documentation available is that of a discouraged and depressed country "both because of food shortages and because of the unfavorable war operations"; harassed and divided by economic problems, convinced that "in the spring, enemy bombing will spread everywhere with extreme violence" and that he considered "the arguments of enemy propaganda to be increasingly well-founded and the optimistic predictions once made by the Axis to be increasingly hasty and unfounded"²; a country in which the number of true fascists, convinced of the need to continue the fight and of the Tripartite's chances of victory, was decreasing day by day, and instead, fatigue with the war prevailed over all other feelings, along with a growing and increasingly less concealed distrust of the regime

¹ The growing scarcity of basic necessities, the continuous increase in prices on the free market and the black market, and low wages gave rise to widespread hostility among the urban petty bourgeoisie, "depressed by the hardships they faced and fearful of the imminent future," towards farmers and peasants and, in general, towards the "greedy speculation of avaricious merchants and shopkeepers" and all those who, rightly or wrongly, were considered to be "wallowing in abundance" and "blessing the war" for the profits it brought them at the expense of "those who do not even have the bare necessities." In turn, as stated in the "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of December 31, 1942-xxi," farmers complained about "the lack of labor, not only due to the actual absence of workers, but also as a result of non-compliance with the rates established by the corporate body. In fact, there is a 'black market' for labor in the agricultural sector, which trade unions are unable to tackle and which forces even the most disciplined employers to go with the flow if they do not want to suffer the serious consequences of forced stoppages in the preparation and sowing of the land.

On the other hand, workers argue that their expenses have risen sharply and, emboldened by the high demand for their services, they are making ever greater demands by any means possible, not least by turning up without a ration card and demanding food in addition to their wages.

Finally, farmers complain that the legal prices of products are too far removed from real prices, which they believe is the main cause of evasion of stockpiling; that there are inexplicable disparities between the prices of various agricultural products, which encourage farmers to favor less useful crops at the expense of those that are important to the country; and, above all, the greatest and most unjustified price disparity occurs between agricultural products in general and industrial products, with the indirect consequence of causing many workers who had hitherto remained attached to the land to desert. As for the workers, in addition to being exploited by the greed of merchants and farmers, they considered themselves - and not without reason - disadvantaged in every respect, starting with wages.

² In this climate, rumors began to circulate insistently about alleged Anglo-American intentions to give life in Libya to a system similar to that "devised" in the French regions of North Africa, namely entrusting certain government tasks to Nitti, Sforza, and other exiles, "thus provoking a veritable secessionist movement that would tend to undermine the foundations of the current political system" (ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943)*, b. 17 4, phase. 4 3, attachment on the situation in Rome from the "memo for the Duce" from the Carabinieri relating to December 1942) and, above all, on possible peace negotiations between Germany and the Ljrss (ibid., attachments on the situations in the provinces of Milan and Genoa).

³ 'Crises of conscience plague even long-standing members of the PNF, who see with dismay how high ideals are being undermined by the guilt or ignorance of leaders and the misdeeds of too many undesirables who have not yet been willing or able to eliminate them.

And the subtle poison of perplexity is even infiltrating certain, even delicate, nerve centers of the bureaucratic organism" (ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, General Directorate of Public Security, Division of General Affairs, 1942*, b. 74, phase K1B-15, sub-file "Modena").

⁴ "Criticism of the regime is becoming more heated and intense every day. The main accusation levelled at Fascism is generally that it failed to foresee where the policy of reclaiming territory would inevitably lead the nation and that it did not, in parallel with this policy, adequately strengthen the armed forces" (ACS, *Private Secretariat of the Duce, Correspondence ref. (1922-1943)*, b. 17 4, phase 43, attachment on the situation in the province of Turin to the "memo for the Duce" relating to December 1942).

in Mussolini himself; and most, having lost all faith in victory, hoped only for a "prompt peace," for "any kind of liberating peace." "regardless of the outcome," very often "without even caring about the consequences," but sometimes also for fear that a further prolongation of the war, in addition to unnecessarily multiplying destruction and sacrifice, could have serious political and social consequences. And it should be noted that these consequences were feared not only by those who, convinced that the war was now lost, looked to the post-war period in terms of the revolutionary crisis that had followed the end of the First World War and wanted to establish their credentials in view of a "red wave" even more violent than that of 1919-20, but also a part of the bourgeoisie and Catholics who deluded themselves that the Axis still had a chance of victory and feared that fascism, 'which arose to combat Bolshevism', would not be able to 'sustain the crisis of the transition from a state of war to peace, even if victorious' or, even worse, would take on a markedly anti-bourgeois stance, becoming the bearer of "dangerous collectivist theories." Finally, there were those who did not rule out that all this could happen during the war itself, if the war did not end quickly and the government was not taken over by the military, partly because of the weakness of the regime, partly because of the "demagoguery" of some of its representatives, especially trade unionists, and under the pressure of the most "troublesome" groups, and partly due to an extreme attempt to divert the mal-

The categories concerned, industrialists and traders, are exasperated by the corruption that reigns supreme in ministries and various trade union and corporate offices, where, according to them, an army of incompetent bureaucrats continuously issue restrictive measures, designed for the sole purpose of making money, stifling all private initiative. The general public, on the other hand, sarcastically points out that the rigors of the law now affect the few greedy farmers who sell eggs for 5 lire, but not the industrialists and traders who enrich themselves with impunity by millions" (ACS, *Min. Interno, Dir. gen. P.S., Segreteria part. del capo della polizia, Senise, b. 8*, fase. 95, Inspector General Peruzzi to Senise, from Milan, October 14, 1942). Notes such as these can be found in almost all police reports and, from the fall of 1942, they became increasingly frequent and unequivocal.

In the aforementioned letter of November 19, Farinacci wrote to Mussolini: "There are traitors who would gladly see the defeat of our arms in order to strike a blow against fascism. And these people have no limits: on trains, in public places, in shelters, they denigrate everyone and everything, inventing all sorts of lies, exaggerating evils and defects, generating discouragement, provoking and encouraging protests and blasphemy. We have all been relegated to the second row. All of them talk about you, without euphemisms or reticence. But the most serious thing is that there is no reaction. The Party is completely absent in the work of disinfection. Young people, so poorly educated in recent years, are rather anarchic and display a spirit of indifference towards the Party and towards you. They are all great men, and they feel capable of completely renewing the environment, which they call 'rotten, corrupt, and impotent' (ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943), b. 44*, phase. 242/R, "R. Farinacci," sub-file 40). In this climate, the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the "March on Rome" were met with general indifference or even aroused the irritation of many. Even Mussolini's speech to the Chamber of Deputies on December 2 (see MUSSOLINI, XXXI, pp. 118 ff.) was met with an unfavorable and often entirely negative response and certainly did not serve to raise the morale of the Italian people. See, in this regard, Document No. 9 in the Appendix, the report "Echoes and comments on the Duce's speech" drawn up by the political police on the basis of opinions and reactions gathered in various social circles in Rome and the rest of the country (ACS, *Min. Interno, Dir. gen. P.S., Div. polizia politica*, cat. 1, b. 225).

contentment of the masses and induce them to rally around Mussolini and fascism in a supreme effort to turn the tide of war^{war}.

Despite this widespread moral and material crisis and the country's increasingly marked detachment from the regime, which the Carabinieri had been denouncing in no uncertain terms in their periodic reports to Mussolini for two months as "the darkest point of our situation," the "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of December 31, 1942-xxi" concluded with an overall assessment that, at first glance, might leave one perplexed and suggest either an erroneous evaluation or a desire on the part of the P.S. leadership not to alarm Mussolini too much:

Currently, the situation throughout the Kingdom can still be considered unworrying; the police are monitoring it closely and always intervene with timely and appropriate rigor, without ever showing weakness or allowing themselves to be carried away by excesses and provocations, which would certainly not constitute a show of strength and could instead result in a real danger to public order.

However, the second hypothesis must be rejected. There is extensive documentation proving that Mussolini was well informed about the state of "public sentiment" and that he followed with extreme attention the repercussions on it of the Anglo-American landing and Rommel's defeats in Africa, the bombing of Italian cities, and the Soviet victories in the east, asking, if necessary, for more detailed information in order to form a more precise idea. He discussed this not only with his closest collaborators and in the Council of Ministers but also in more crowded forums such as the PNF leadership. His speeches to the latter on January 3 and March 1, 1943, are significant in this regard. In the first, speaking of operations in Africa, he said:

This landing on November 8 also had psychological consequences on many Italians. In fact, many were sent into exile after 1948.

and therefore their moral unpreparedness to face the ordeal of war, at least with confidence in their own abilities, as a community, to play a role no less dignified than that of other national communities. Hence a series of behaviors that can only be understood and evaluated by grasping their internal motivations and actual meaning. Hence, returning to the police's assessment of the 'public spirit' at the end of 1942, its substantial reliability, despite the fact that at first glance it may appear to contradict what the 'situation' in the previous pages, analyzing the internal reality of that period of the year and with a series of facts reported by various sources of information from the regime that would seem to suggest a more radical one.

Nor was this assessment limited to the P.S. Three months earlier, on September 24, when the war in the Mediterranean had not yet reached its turning point, the Yugoslav attaché to the Holy See, Costa Zu-kotic, had drawn up a memorandum for Myron Taylor, who was on a mission to the Vatican at the time, which is worth reproducing in its entirety: on closer reading, the overall assessment of the Italian situation that emerges from it is not substantially different from that formulated by the authors of the "situation" report at the end of December.

- 1) For many years, no authoritative voice has been raised against the totalitarian regime. The political victims of the regime are almost exclusively young Slavs from Trieste and Gorizia, a large number of whom have been sentenced to death and killed over the last twenty years.
- 2) It is said that there are some military figures (Badoglio and a few others) who do not approve of the war alongside Germany, but these figures have always obeyed, received titles, promotions, and other favors from the regime, and resigned or were removed only after suffering failures.
- 3) No hope can be placed in the dynasty, which has always shown complete submission to the regime, a submission that goes so far as to recognize the Grand Council of Fascism's right to change the order of succession to the throne.
- 4) It is true that murmurs and secret criticism are very frequent. It is a kind of ^x fashionable, even among the party's senior leaders and Mussolini's close associates. But there is no need to look for ideological reasons for this criticism; rather, there are practical reasons. If there is a shortage of bread or the war news is bad, criticism increases; if, on the contrary, the news is good and hunger less acute, criticism decreases! An instructive experiment in this regard was carried out when Tobruk fell and Rommel advanced into Egypt. There is no denying that there are sincere critics, honest people, and faithful Christians who understand the absurdity of this war for Italy, but all these Italian friends, when they talk among themselves or with foreigners, come to the same conclusion: it is true, but what can we do?

- 5) There is poverty. But poverty is relative, more acute in cities than in the countryside. Italy is an agricultural country where, thanks to the favorable climate, the land produces abundantly in all seasons. Germans arriving in Italy now find it a true paradise compared to their own country. And everyone in Germany aspires to visit Italy for the undoubtedly legitimate purpose of satisfying the needs of their stomachs. For Germany, the Italian alliance is a real stroke of luck, allowing it not only to bring the war to the Mediterranean and Africa, but also to alleviate its economic difficulties and continue the fight.
- 6) Since the country has so far been spared the horrors of war, it is possible to sleep peacefully and enjoy a certain degree of security. The Italians hope to ultimately benefit from the indulgence of the British and Americans, whose weakness for the "bel paese" is well known.
- 7) Finally, it should not be forgotten that the country is, at least partially, under German occupation and control. Consequently, any allusion to a movement in favor of ceasing hostilities and abandoning the ally-protector is unfounded. The current regime will be overthrown, perhaps even violently, in Italy only when Germany's defeat is complete.

In the early months of 1943, the worsening of the economic situation in ^{general} and living conditions in ^{particular}, the increasingly massive

Allied bombings and the succession of Axis defeats in the Mediterranean and on the Eastern Front—the surrender of the German army surrounded at Stalingrad and the tragedy of the Armir¹ had an enormous psychological effect

- greatly accentuating the state of crisis and, in particular, the country's detachment from the regime. The "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of February 28, 1943-xxi" already recorded a further deterioration in "public spirit" compared to two months earlier:

The loss of Libya, particularly dear to the hearts of the people, the Anglo-Saxon pressure that is being organized against our remaining bastion in Africa, the increasingly intense and widespread air offensive that is sowing grief and ruin on the soil of the Fatherland, and the successes of the Soviet armies have produced a sense of deep apprehension among our people.

Unfortunately, however, a part of the population is showing an incomprehensible apathy that translates into a real detachment from the vicissitudes of war: they are waiting for peace and only peace.

Contributing to this deplorable state of mind are the imprudent indiscretions about the poverty of our resources (indirectly confirmed by certain compromises in the equipping of the troops, such as the invitation to those called up to bring their own blankets), the complaints that soldiers, even those at the front, express about the deficiencies in food and clothing, the anguished silence of many Armir combatants, the stories spread by displaced persons from centers severely affected by raids, and the dissemination of news by enemy radio stations, a subtle poison for which our propaganda has no effective antidote...

The people feel that many sectors of the state administration are tainted by favoritism, and that corporate bodies are even more so, weighed down by a plethora and costly bureaucracy, greedy for contributions that significantly reduce workers' wages and producers' earnings, and they want

hinetto, b. 251, phase. "Monthly reports on censorship services"). Various regions also reported an increase in evasion and delays in the delivery of agricultural products to the stockpiles, even those, such as oil, which had recorded a bountiful harvest. The financial situation was no better, characterized, on the one hand, by an increase in savings deposits in banks and credit unions and, on the other, by a search for investments in real estate purchases. It should also be noted that the increase in savings deposits since mid-1942 had been offset by an equally significant tendency among large industries (including Fiat) to reduce payments, not to use the money they received from the state for payments, and to resort instead to banks for this purpose. A letter from Azzolini to Mussolini dated December 4, 1942, reveals that between July and October, the Treasury departments of the Bank of Italy in Milan, Turin, and Genoa had made payments for military supplies amounting to 1,907, 1,602, and 1,144 million respectively, which had not been returned to the Bank of Italy and did not appear to have been deposited with other banks either (see ARCHIVIO BANCA D'ITALIA, *Archivio Azzolini*, pratica 4). Finally, stock market activity was increasingly scarce, especially on the stock market.

¹ Monsignor Spellman, who was in the Vatican at the end of February to discuss the Italian situation with the Pope and relations between the Holy See and the Allied governments after the events following M. Taylor's mission, wrote to Roosevelt on March 4, 1943, observing in this regard that "anti-German sentiment" was "very strong and profound," and that the events of the Armir had contributed greatly to this: "The stories of the wounded men and officers, among those few who survived the Russian front, are heartbreaking, especially in those details that describe the Germans' actions in abandoning the wounded Italian soldiers during the retreat."

In the same letter, Monsignor Spellman also wrote about the situation in Italy, saying that "the people are suffering in a shocking way. There is a lot of hunger and weakness. The bread is black and straw-like, prices are decidedly and increasingly inflated... Ninety-nine percent of Italians, in my opinion, would make peace tomorrow if they could... I do not believe that there is anyone in Italy who thinks that Italy can win the war..." (cf. E. DI NOLFO, *Vaticano e Stati Uniti 1939-1952* cit., pp. 242 ff.).

All this must be remedied, restoring a sense of duty and honesty everywhere.

This is a serious moral malaise that undermines the people's capacity for resistance and which, it can be said, exceeds the material hardship of the state of war itself. If, despite this, there are no signs of open discontent, it is thanks to the nation's innate spirit of discipline, which also rules out with certainty, at least for the moment, any likelihood of disturbances to public order.

But the unease exists and must be taken into account.

Contrary to police predictions, numerous large-scale strikes took place in March and April, mainly involving workers, which affected the northern regions in particular, but did not spare the others either, indicating that the 'malaise' referred to in the 'Situation' (dated the day before the first strikes began in Turin) was actually greater than its authors had thought. That said, it should be added immediately that historians have attributed a significance and importance to the strikes of March-April that, on closer examination of the facts, appear to be excessive. While on the one hand they constitute a fact that cannot be ignored if one wishes to establish the breadth and depth of the crisis that was now pervading much of the country, leading to collective behavior that had been unthinkable until recently, on the other hand, it is very difficult to attribute to them political motivations and intentions that they did not have or that were only held by a tiny minority of those who participated, who were already politicized. Furthermore, when all is said and done, they had, on the crisis itself, its spread, acceleration, and politicization, a weight that, on closer inspection, than that which, in May, had the definitive cancellation of the African front as a result of the capitulation of the Italian-German forces which, after the loss of Libya and the Allied occupation of Morocco and Algeria, had barricaded themselves in the last Tunisian redoubt. And this, let's be clear, was not because there were still many who hoped for a reversal of the fighting in Tunisia, but because the complete ousting of the Axis from Africa made even those who had hitherto, so to speak, forbidden themselves to "venture a thought or a hope" about what would follow the loss of the last overseas bridgehead aware that the war would soon directly affect Italian soil itself. It was this, more than anything else, that made it even more in-

The idea of a further prolongation of the war, with the inevitable increase in sacrifices and daily hardships that this would entail, and with the prospect (not to say certainty) of being directly involved in horrors far greater than those experienced so far with aerial bombardments, was unbearable to a large number of Italians from all walks of life.

On closer inspection, the key to understanding both the overall dynamics of the "public spirit" in the first half of 1943 and the significance to be attributed to the strikes of March-April lies precisely in this state of mind. Despite the growing desire for peace until the surrender in Tunisia (May 13, 1943), it was essentially intellectuals, most of whom were linked to the liberal-democratic tradition, and groups of anti-fascists more or less involved in the process of reconstituting anti-fascist parties who were calling for action to get Italy out of the conflict. In other groups and social classes, the now almost universal loss of all confidence or illusion in victory, and the deepening mistrust and aversion towards the regime, had been matched by an attitude still characterized by war weariness, economic hardship, and above all a sort of annihilation and passivity that exhausted all energy in daily life and blocked any real politicization.

the many reservations expressed about our air and naval efficiency, and the consequent feared possibility of an Anglo-American landing on the territory of the Motherland.

Reservations are also being made about Germany's military efficiency compared to that of the Russian armies. Quite a few people assume that the Germans will not be able to commit themselves fully against the Soviets, as they will have to remain ready to effectively parry any enemy attempt to land in Europe.

Hence a mood of heightened mistrust regarding the victorious outcome of the conflict. The intellectual classes in particular are pervaded by the blackest pessimism" (ACS, *Private Secretariat of the Duce, Correspondence ref. (1922-1943)*, b. 175, phase. 44, 'Memorandum for the Duce' by the CCRP relating to May 1943).

¹ In an information note from the Ministry of Popular Culture, dated January 15, 1943, we read, with regard to the duration of the war: "while last year it was said that 'it could last for years,' now it is insisted that 'this year it must end'" (ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare*, b. 199). The same attitude is reported in another note dated April 12: "the public, in all its categories, is anchored to the concept that the war is coming to an end; while until last year there was talk of [its] end as something far in the future, now the majority believes that 'by the summer' the game must be decided; and it is added: 'at least as far as Italy is concerned.'" (ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943)*, b. 202 bis, fase. "Varie 1943").

² This situation was summarized as follows in the "Political and Economic Situation of the Kingdom as of December 31, 1942-xxi": "The unfavorable military events of the last quarter could not fail to have a direct influence on the political arena, even if for now there has been no notable increase in organized subversive activity, apart from the Slavic movements that have been discovered in Venezia Giulia and which occupy a separate place.

Anti-fascism, on the other hand, understood as a manifestation of mistrust, has spread throughout every social stratum.

The anti-fascism of the lowest social and cultural elements does not, at least for now, give rise to serious concern, as it appears to be something contingent, linked more than anything else to war weariness and serious economic hardship.

The anti-fascism of intellectuals, on the other hand, has deeper roots and undoubtedly represents a danger, especially because it is widely accepted among young people and even within the ranks of Party organizations (ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, General Directorate of Public Security, Division of General Affairs and Resources, Statistics*, b. 4).

Not to mention the fears of a number of middle-class and Catholic circles about taking a leap into the unknown, which could have resulted in even greater evils than those already present. In the second half of May, after the end of operations in Africa, the situation entered a new, more dynamic phase: increasingly numerous bourgeois and popular sectors began to emerge from the passivity that had characterized their attitude until then, to express more clearly their opposition to the regime and their aversion to the Germans, and to show themselves more receptive to the propaganda and initiatives of the clandestine anti-fascist parties and groups, all of which were now at various stages of organization.

Day by day, discontent [over the food situation, the bombings, and the regime's inefficiency] is growing ever wider and deeper, and the tone of the complaints is also rising steadily... The popular reactions... are active, strong, continuous, and tortuous, reaching unthinkable heights... The feeling of opposition, almost of general hostility, towards the established authority, rather than diminishing, is growing stronger and deeper. It is reaching strata and positions where it would never have been thought possible...

Despite its simplicity and immediacy, this focus on the "public spirit" after the fall of Tunisia and the spread of the idea of an imminent Anglo-American landing, as reported in two memos to Mussolini dated June 12 and 19,¹ clearly illustrates the extent and essential aspects of the change in climate that took place in the second half of May.

For a more complete picture, it is obviously necessary to take other aspects into account as well. In our opinion, however, it is from these and, more generally, from

¹ ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943)*, b. 202 bis, fasc. 'Varie 1943'. With regard more specifically to the aversion to the Germans, another briefing note dated July 3 is significant (ibid.)

(1943):

"The descriptions of the horrors resulting from the enemy's bombing of Italian cities, which are beginning to have an effect on the masses. More than in the past, people today use harsh and heated terms when commenting on the ruthless enemy attacks from above and, due to this British or American brutality, far from hiding their apprehensions and fears, they are beginning to show clear signs of terror and even bewilderment.

This change in mood, that is, this nascent or growing feeling of horror at the enemy's behavior, does not yet have its natural outlet, hatred for the enemy, as the presence of the Germans in Italy acts as an antidote. It may seem strange, given that we share the same enemy as the Germans, but that is how it is. Many people feel that Italy is no longer free to do as it pleases but is subject to the political and military will of Germany, and this feeling, while not preventing them from hating the enemy, greatly attenuates this sentiment, generating another feeling, namely that the conflict between the Axis and the Allies no longer concerns us but has become an exclusively German affair.

Some time ago, there was a feeling that an enemy landing in Italy would immediately unite and strengthen the spirit, purpose, and will of the Italian people, and for this reason, it was almost to be hoped for. Today, in some circles where people of notable intellect, culture, wisdom, and prestige from the old and new regimes often meet, there are serious doubts about the possibility of such unity, precisely because of the presence of the Germans in Italy, a presence that is not justified, wisdom, and prestige, from both the old and new regimes, the possibility of such unity is seriously questioned, precisely because of the presence of the Germans in Italy, a presence that is not justified by the behavior of Italian soldiers and which, it is claimed, would be an offense to the tradition and military honor of the entire nation.

From our reconstruction of the various moments and their main manifestations, through which the , which must be taken as a starting point if we are to attempt to give an overall assessment of how Italians experienced the war and their relationship with the regime until July 25.

Among the various aspects that must also be taken into account, the most important is certainly the impact that the Church and anti-fascism had on the "public spirit" after the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa and, above all, after the expulsion of the Axis from Tunisia. For the sake of brevity, we will not discuss the others. However, given the consequences it had both on the events we are dealing with in this volume and, even more so, on those that will be the subject of the next one, it is impossible not to mention, even if only *in passing*, the fact that the process of considerable social and cultural uniformization of the psychological, moral, and political detachment from the regime that took place during this period was matched only by a very limited recomposition of relations between the various social classes, strata, and groups: except for marginal cases, they continued to regard each other with mutual suspicion, if not hostility, seeing each other not so much as victims of a common condition and a common drama, but as equally responsible for their own condition and drama, and not infrequently looking to the future from this perspective. Although expressed in extreme terms that reveal how little the Allies, and the Americans in particular, understood the Italian situation, this reality is even present in a document (dated between the end of September and the end of October 1942 and attributed to M. Taylor¹, and therefore a direct result of his contacts with the Vatican in the last ten days of September) for Roosevelt, which reads:

There is growing concern among those in Italy who would welcome the demise of fascism that, without the presence of a foreign military power to maintain order, the transition period would be one of complete chaos and therefore more undesirable than the current situation. This would suggest that, with the Germans already occupying the country, anti-fascists are beginning to look to them for protection in the event of an internal revolution. As this tendency is likely to become more pronounced rather than diminish with the passage of time, it is urgent that the Anglo-Saxon countries convince their Italian anti-fascist friends that they are capable of dealing with any revolutionary situation that may arise.

E. DINOLFO, *Vatican and United States 1939-1952*, op. cit., pp. 197 ff.

After a fruitless search for new formulas and new directions, former members of the Popular Party revived and updated the old Sturzia program, reviving it at meetings held in the suburbs—generally under the auspices of the A.C.—in order to reunite the scattered ranks of the PPI.

The clergy is no stranger to the movement, which—while agreeing on the actual existence of the "Bolshevik threat"—is equally unanimous in rejecting the "totalitarian system," encouraged in this by the political stance of certain Vatican circles and, in particular, by the doctrinal discussions in *L'Osservatore Romano* on "social and moral problems," with constant references to the favorite themes of "freedom" and "the rights of the state over the individual" and frequent references to pastoral letters and papal encyclicals.

Among the prelates, there are sincere cases of understanding of the moment that the country is going through; but the patriotic fervor of some does not find an echo in the consciences of the majority, where from time to time elements of particular combative activity are revealed in the campaign to discredit the regime.

Significant is the recent decisive opposition of the parish priest of the Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart in Bologna, who, inviting the men of his parish to Easter penance, did not hesitate to equate fascism and Nazism with communism, indicating them, in a widely distributed leaflet, as completely "unfit to guide the governed nations in the true light of justice."

It is highly probable that the tone of the document was influenced by the fact that, as we shall see later, from mid-April onwards, the police force was no longer headed by the experienced and "moderate" Senise (a typical expression of that pre-fascist state bureaucracy that for years had zealously and loyally supported and served the regime and now tended to distance itself from it), but an old fascist 'intransigent' old fascist like Renzo Chierici. In any case, there is no doubt that Catholics had been greatly affected by the general deterioration of the internal situation and its worsening over the last few months.

Countless sources attest to a marked increase in popular pacifism with a religious background and hopes for peaceful action by ^{the Pope}, and, conversely, an equally marked breakdown of what De Rosa called the "half-consensus," the "consensus with reservations" that had characterized large sections of Catholic society during the early years of the war, and even some of the more strictly Catholic-nationalist positions. This included those who—dismayed at the idea of an affirmation of

(¹) On February 4, 1943, the Borgo police station, which was responsible for surveillance of Vatican City, sent the following communication to the Rome police commissioner: "I have been confidentially informed that during yesterday morning's general audience in the Vatican, several people, especially women, asked the Supreme Pontiff, as he passed by, to work towards the achievement of a speedy peace, and that the Pontiff assured them that all his daily prayers are addressed to God, asking him to restore peace to the whole world." (*ACS, Min. Interno, Dir. gen. P.S., Div. affarigen. eris., Second World War, b. 420, phase. 140*).

communism - they nurtured the hope that, faced with the "barbaric violence" of the Slavs and Bolshevism, Anglo-Saxons (in reality England, since hostility towards the US among Catholic nationalists was only slightly less than that towards the USSR) and Germans could find a solution to the conflict and that, in this perspective, Italy and Mussolini could play a positive role in bringing together Latin and Christian nations and promoting "European unity." In the ranks of Catholic Action (for the police more

¹ To gain a clearer understanding of this line of thinking, which was also shared by devout Catholic fascists, and of some of its precedents, it is worth reading a two-part article by C. Lovera di Castiglione, *Il problema dell'unità europea (The problem of European unity)*, published in L'Italia on June 26-27, 1943. Formerly a member of the Catholic Action youth movement and a contributor to Bonatelli's *Segni dei tempi*, Lovera concluded his article as follows: 'Just as the quarrels between church towers have ceased, then the feudal ones, then the regional ones, we must also overcome certain narrow-minded and exaggerated forms of nationalism, so that all European peoples can come together in a great new endeavor, to which each contributes and, while remaining true to themselves, collaborates in giving Europe a new aspect, placing it on the same level as the great intercontinental collaborations.'

If, of course, the Christian spirit were to return with renewed vigor, dispelling the northern pagan mists, we could look forward to a better tomorrow with greater certainty and confidence.

Who knows, perhaps the merciful God is preparing this day, despite the ill will of many Europeans, weighed down by so much bloodshed, so much pain, and so many provocations.

What makes the article particularly significant, showing how influential sectors of the Catholic world continued to the end to give credit to Mussolini's policy and his efforts to induce Hitler to adopt a more realistic attitude, is the fact that Lovera linked much of his argument on the conditions for future European convergence and solidarity that would overcome "individual particularisms" to the speech given by Bastianini in the Senate the previous month and, above all, to two articles by Francesco Orestano that appeared in *Gerarchia*.

A typical Catholic-fascist representative, even though he had a positivist education (see in this regard E. GARIN, *Cronache di filosofia italiana (1900-1943)*, Bari 1955, *passim*, and especially pp. 150 ff.), Orestano was – as we have already mentioned – a supporter of the New Order, but he had always sought to distinguish it from the Nazi regime. In particular, in an article (*Nuovo ordine europeo*) published in *Gerarchia* in January 1942, he had "rectified" Hitler's statement that Europe was "a racial and cultural expression," observing that this implied either the abandonment of the concepts of "living space" and "economic space" or the 'reduction to servitude' of the peoples of other races and cultures included in these 'spaces,' and he had re-proposed the thesis, already expressed in his book *Verso la nuova Europa (Towards the New Europe)*, that the new European system should have 'the shape of an ellipse with two foci: Rome and Berlin'. In the December 1942 issue of the same magazine, he returned to the subject, addressing a particular aspect of it, that of *The Religious Life of the New Europe*. The article, which appears to have been agreed upon with the editor-in-chief of *Gerarchia*, Carlo Ravasio (see R. A. GRAHAM, *The Religious Question in the Axis Crisis. The Orestano-Hudal debate [1942-1943]*, in "La civiltà cattolica," March 5, 1977, p. 445), caused a great stir not only in Italy but also in Germany and England. Orestano argued that religious life was central to European peoples, "so that for centuries Europe and Christianity were synonymous." Hence the need to "ask ourselves what fate is in store for Christian civilization in the future European order," which, above all, constituted "the greatest moral energy" that united and gave impetus and vigor to all those who fought "the apocalyptic Russian-Asian Antichrist." This was all the more so, he continued, given that there was reason to fear that "positively irreligious and anti-Christian tendencies" were aiming to conquer "public power," thereby weakening and undermining the unity of Europe. From this general premise, Orestano launched into a long analysis of the "separatist process" characterizing "the German genius" which, with Nietzsche, had arrived at a philosophy that only Bolshevism was more anti-Christian and atheistic and which was at the root of the "neo-paganism of Rosenberg, Ludendorff, etc. He concluded by inviting Germany to achieve a "higher sense of human universality" by listening to "the word of Rome"; "in the history of Rome," Germany—again according to Orestano—would in fact find

"unique examples and lessons on how to unite yesterday's enemies, to establish a lasting and fruitful pax romana among peoples of different blood, language, customs, culture, and religion," as well as "the meaning and secret of catholicity, which is not only abstract and conceptual universality, but lived universality, organized human universality, active organization of universality."

In Italy, the article immediately aroused the wrath of the most ardently pro-Nazi and racist fascist groups, foremost among them those of *La vita italiana*. In its February 1943 issue, the magazine published a highly aggressive article by J. Evola, *Sfasature nelle relazioni intellettuali italo-germaniche (Discrepancies in Italian-German Intellectual Relations)*, in which Orestano and "certain of our writers

more numerous than officially reported because "especially those who are employed by the state or hold positions in the regime's organizations" often avoided formal registration so as not to put themselves in a bad light). For several months, roughly since the Allied landing in French North Africa, there had been a certain amount of unrest: 'a growing antipathy towards fascism' and a sort of anticipation of the moment when Catholics would be the only real force capable of gathering power.

cinorosi" (and, albeit in a different way, G. Gentile accused of an opposite "left-wing revolutionary tendency"), who wanted to revive Guelphism and make Italy "a kind of secular arm of the Church" with the mission of "converting all the peoples of the world to the Catholic faith, starting with Germany," were practically accused of undermining "all efforts at understanding" between Italy and Germany and, therefore,

"as well as any constructive work regarding what the Axis can offer as a spiritual reference point for the European space that belongs to it." In the same issue, without referring to Orestano, Preziosi took a stand in favor of the *loyalty and stability of the Italian-German agreement* with a note that appeared at the same time in the Italian *Beobachter*. Nor did the campaign in *La vita italiana* stop there. Preziosi returned to the fray in the March issue, *In margine della lealtà dei rapporti italo-germanici* (On the loyalty of Italian-German relations), personally attacking Orestano as a pro-Semite, and in the April issue, publishing an article by W. WUSTER, *Relazioni culturali italo-germaniche di oggi e di domani* (Italian-German cultural relations today and tomorrow), in which Orestano's theses were contested once again (although the philosopher's name did not appear in the article) and, this time, by a Nazi author.

Several youth and local fascist newspapers spoke out in favor of Orestano; *L'Italia*, *L'avvenire d'Italia*, and *L'Osservatore Romano* published more or less extensive excerpts and quotations from his article (as did various Swiss, Hungarian, and Romanian newspapers). However, we believe that the most significant fact was the publication of extensive reports and excerpts by *Civiltà fascista* (January 1943) and *L'Ordine nuovo* (January 16-February 1, 1943), two official institutions whose favorable attitude practically rules out the hypothesis that Orestano's article was a sort of bomb that exploded unexpectedly in the hands of its author and Ravasio. Privately, Orestano also found numerous supporters among Austrian and German Catholic personalities and even among Protestants. To supplement and clarify what Graham wrote in his aforementioned essay, it should be noted that Monsignor Alois Hudal (rector of the Church of the Holy Soul in Rome and advocate of reconciliation between National Socialism and Christianity) wanted to publish his own article in *Gerarchia* to discuss Orestano's article and then collect them, together with a third (possibly by Papini), in a small volume "to propagate what we all want with all our hearts: religious peace." Only after Orestano informed him that "obvious reasons of expediency" prevented both publications did Monsignor Hudal publish his own article (which he had previously submitted to Orestano) at his own expense and in a limited number of copies. See, in addition to the aforementioned essay by R. A. Graham, A. C. HUDAL, *Römische Tagebücher. Lebensbeichte eines alten Bischofs*, Graz-Stuttgart 1976, pp. 18 and 217, and above all ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto*, b. 2, phase, I, "Francesco Orestano."

Goebbels' *diary* (op. cit., p. 339) shows that Orestano's article, which appeared in Mussolini's personal magazine, worried and irritated the Germans (it is clear that the Italians "tend... to claim rights to spiritual dominance in Europe, given that military and political dominance has slipped from their hands"). However, they preferred not to take a position for the time being, waiting for "a more favorable opportunity," perhaps even after victory, when, as Goebbels noted, "we will be able to address the issue of the Church openly." Nor can it be ruled out that Berlin's decision not to make an issue of Orestano's article was influenced by the fact that Allied propaganda, and Radio London in particular, had already done so, first giving it wide coverage and then, after Evola's reply, referring to it *tout court* as the "Farinacci-Mussolini controversy." That being the case, an official or even unofficial German statement would inevitably have led the Allies to speak of the "Hitler-Mussolini controversy."

Contrary to what Graham – the only person who dealt with the matter to any extent – seems to believe, the attacks in *La vita italiana* and the uproar caused by Radio London over Orestano's article and the controversy it sparked did not put an end to the matter. At the beginning of April, in order not to dramatize relations with the Germans, Biggini, who had meanwhile replaced Bottai at the Ministry of National Education, deemed it inappropriate to send Orestano to speak at the Italian Institute in Berlin, *Studia humanitatis* (see E. CASTELL, *Pensieri e giornale, Diario intimo*, Rome 1945, pp. 101 ff.). The following month, however, *Gerarchia* published a new article by the philosopher (*Del nuovo ordine europeo [On the New European Order]*) which revisited the subject of the first article from a different angle: no longer specifically religious and cultural, but rather that of a discussion

^{re1}. By 1943, this ferment had gradually become more defined and, especially in youth organizations,² had taken on an increasingly political character, even if, in general, it was more wait-and-see than activist. In ^{the FUCI}³ the first signs of a change of course had already appeared in 1942, after

of the American (note, not allied, as Orestano clearly implied that between the two Western *partners*, the initiative and hegemony belonged to the US, or rather to American high finance, which tended to monopolize all wealth in its own hands) and Soviet "solutions" regarding the "human future" and Europe in particular, and how Europe should face these threats by focusing on 'a more extensive and closer integration between its territories and peoples in all respects'; without dwelling 'on respectable but now anachronistic, out-of-step and dangerous particularisms and localisms'. Against the dual American and Soviet threat, the path to be taken had to be that - to which Lovera di Castiglione would refer in his article the following month in 'L'Italia' of a "plurinational state," in which all European peoples "without exception" would integrate, feeling that they belonged "to a human aristocracy, a moral aristocracy, which it is futile and criminal to deny and depress, or worse, destroy." And here the discussion linked back to that in the January article: Europe as a synonym for Christianity, Christianity as the indispensable cement for the construction of a plurinational state capable of representing the whole of Europe in the face of the Americans and Soviets.

Based on this second article (against which J. Evola immediately took a stand in "Il regime fa-scista" on May 18), it seems increasingly difficult to think of the first as a bomb that exploded in the hands of Orestano and, above all, Ravasio. It seems difficult to hypothesize that Mussolini was behind the whole operation, and there is no evidence to support this. However, there seems to be no doubt that it was an operation, just as it seems extremely likely that both the Catholic and Fascist sides orchestrated it in the belief that they could put pressure on both Mussolini and the Holy See to reach an agreement that, rather than influencing Germany, would serve to facilitate Italy's exit from the conflict. This is all the more so given that we know that Ravasio considered relations with the Church to be very important and those who treated the Vatican 'from above' to be lacking in sensitivity and political intelligence (see *Report to the Duce*, op. cit., pp. 396 ff.; Ravasio's diary, dated July 11, 1942) and sought, as far as possible, to amicably resolve at least some issues with the Holy See, which considered him "a person worthy of esteem and trust" (cf. ADSS, V, p. 310).

¹ From Milan, on January 3, 1943, a police informant in contact with the Catholic Action movement reported to Rome:

"The current state of military and political uncertainty has suddenly rekindled hidden hopes for an end to the regime and a return to the old positions of the Italian parties.

With Fascism collapsed after military defeat and the nightmare of Teutonic tyranny consequently disappeared, Italy, battered by the struggle, should appeal to its surviving internal forces to attempt a gradual, slow reconstruction of the country, both spiritually and socially.

When examining the conditions of the parties opposed to Fascism, one finds only ruins: Communism, which has many secret followers, especially among industrial workers, will always be repressed as anti-social, perhaps with the help of Anglo-American bayonets, which—now that the fear of losing the war has passed—have no interest in leaving Europe at the mercy of Stalin; Socialism no longer exists, having been too compromised by Fascism; while liberals and democrats have long since joined the regime, and the Republicans are reduced to a miserable little group composed almost entirely of exiles, now ruined.

The only compact form, the only form of social order, on which one can and must rely, is that constituted by the clericals gathered around Catholic Action, which not only disappeared in the face of Fascism, but, thanks to the far-sighted maneuvering of Pius XI and as a result of the Conciliation, has gained new strength, has victoriously sustained its struggle against its adversary, which is materially much more powerful but morally inferior, has closed ranks and increased the number of its followers, and has ended up quietly organizing a new ruling class" (ACS, *Min. Interno, Dir. gen. P. S., Div. affari gen. e ris., 1930-1945, G. 1, b. 115*).

² From April 20 to 23, 1943, a national conference of diocesan leaders (about three hundred) of the Catholic Action Youth Movement was held in Castelgandolfo, in the villa of the Collegio Urbano. The theme, seemingly quite innocuous, was the family in the light of the Pope's Christmas message. It was introduced and discussed from various points of view by Ferdinando Storchi and Giuseppe Mira, who gave their reports a clearly political slant, so much so that the police informant who followed the proceedings of the conference (which ended with the screening of the film *Pastor Angelicus*) concluded his report with this assessment: "The final impression of the conference can be summarized as follows: 'Young Catholics, prepare yourselves, because the time is coming to have our say in national political life, to speak of regeneration and reorganization.' These precise

In February, he had taken over the leadership from Aldo Moro, who had favored an essentially religious-cultural approach. Giulio Andreotti, who had tried to give his activities a more political character (typical in this sense is the speech he gave in September at the Assisi conference), which had not escaped the attention of the police and had attracted the attention of Mussolini himself (who personally intervened twice to have Azione fucina seized). In the early months of 1943, this push had resulted in an increasingly clear distancing from fascism, a pacifism that was no longer, as before, essentially theoretical and in practice largely patriotic, but now clearly oriented towards a genuine rejection of war (even by those who had joined it only in the name of obedience to the established power), and a preparation and anticipation of the moment when, once the fascist experience was over, Catholics would have the task of rebuilding the state on entirely new foundations, different from those desired by the former popular Catholicism "of liberal descent." A similar process, albeit beginning a little later and articulated in slightly different, less fundamentalist terms, had also taken place in the other intellectual movement of Catholic Action, that of the Laureati. Among the various organized Catholic groups, the FUCI and the Laureati were, despite their particular positions, the ones that most conformed to the directives of the leaders of Catholic Action and, therefore, of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and, through it, of the Holy See. This fact deserves to be emphasized because, whatever the processes at work in the organized Catholic world and in the clergy, there is no doubt that their development (as well as on their assumption, after the fall of fascism, of less ethical-religious contours, typical of young people who had remained outside the circles of popular anti-fascism and had experienced fascism and their own detachment from it in the spirit of an unrealistic 'new order' to be realized, and more political) was decisive.

As we have already mentioned, until the reversal of the situation in November 1942 and the failure of the German offensive in Russia, it had been more or less consciously inspired by the hope of a double defeat of the Bolshevik Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany. This is not the place to discuss either the realism (or, if you prefer, the anachronism) of this approach, or its reasons, both the deeper ones of a religious-cultural nature and those rooted in

you say in ^{Vatican} diplomatic tradition. This hope, in truth, had already been considerably undermined when Myron Taylor visited ^{the Vatican} in the second half of September and explained to the Pope and his principal collaborators the postwar views and plans of Roosevelt and the Western Allies in ^{a broad sense}. Roosevelt's personal representative was explicit on three points in particular: the president's decision to continue the fight against Germany until the Nazi disease had been completely eradicated; his desire to dispel any misunderstanding about the solidity of the Anglo-American-Soviet alliance and collaboration, its continuation during the peace negotiations, and the new order to be established in Europe after the war. That being the case, any attempt at mediation to achieve a compromise peace, even if made through the Pope or promoted by him, would have been rejected and therefore completely useless. According to his summary of conversations with Pius XII, Taylor was extremely explicit:

Since we know we are right, and since we have supreme confidence in our strength, we are determined to fight until we achieve complete victory. The only thing that could induce us to lay down the arms we have taken up in defense of national security and world decency would be a complete and explicit acceptance of the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations Manifesto—whose clauses are essentially analogous to the postulates mentioned above by the Holy Father for a just and lasting peace. Our cause is just. We fight with clear conscience for the moral rights of our nation and for the freedoms of our people; our victory will secure these rights and freedoms for the world. Even our enemies know that we seek no aggrandizement. Precisely because our moral position is unassailable, we are not open to the compromises that are customary for those who seek only material advantages and who would negotiate for half a loaf if they could not have the whole...

Our confidence in a final and complete victory is built on the most objective foundations. There is no emotional optimism or *wishful thinking* involved. We are prepared for a long war. We have anticipated initial defeats. But in the end,

we know that no nation or alliance of nations can stand against us on the battlefield...

A non-definitive peace would be a partial victory for the Axis, and would lead to a resumption of the conflict at a later date under conditions that could be disadvantageous to us and to the things we defend. We do not want to hear about it. We do not want to hear about an armed truce that would be a respite for the enemies of Christian civilization. We will not give way to the grand strategy of the Axis, which includes in its arsenal the hypocrisy of false peace, to maintain the initiative in the conduct of this war. We have decided that we cannot deal with dishonest men; that the peaceful avenues of diplomacy have completely failed in the face of the duplicity, lack of mercy, and insensitivity to any moral consideration on the part of the Axis. This is not the time for diplomacy. Having made every effort to avoid war, we will not be weakened by the cunning of the Axis now that we have entered the fray. We believe that "peace" proposals inspired by the Axis would be nothing more than a direct blow against us.

There is reason to believe that our enemies of the Axis will attempt, through subtle channels, to push the Holy See to support proposals for peace without victory in the near future. In the current situation of the belligerents, we can realize how much pressure the Axis powers can exert on the Vatican. Therefore, we feel compelled to support the Holy See in resisting any undue pressure from this source. This is why we feel compelled to make our views on peace known and to emphasize that the growing power of the United States is now being used to reestablish those principles of decency and international justice that have been so clearly indicated by the Holy See...

The war aims of the United States are aims of peace. The world knows them. The Atlantic Charter sets forth conditions which, in our deepest conviction, cannot be surrendered. Any proposal, presented as a "negotiated peace," which would depart from these objectives would only serve to confuse issues which we are determined to keep separate and to resolve once and for all.

In the Vatican, such an intransigent position could not fail to cause concern and alarm. In practice, it meant that the Holy See had to give up almost completely, at least for the time being, any idea or possibility of working to shorten the war and, at the same time, had to accept as a certainty what until then had been a prospect that it had hoped would not come true, namely that once the war was won, the Allies, and Roosevelt in particular, would not oppose Soviet hegemonic claims in Europe and would not oppose the ideology and "state practice" of communism. That being the case, for the Holy See—Pius XII unwilling and unable to

fail in his formal impartiality towards the two warring blocs, given that in that case he would have had to make an unacceptable distinction between National Socialist and Bolshevik anti-Christianity. The only courses of action left were, on the one hand, to try to alleviate the horrors of war as much as possible and to protect Catholics under German domination, doing everything possible to prevent Hitler, appealing to their lack of loyalty to the Axis cause, from continuing his action against them or, worse, intensify them, and, on the other hand, to establish an ever broader and deeper relationship with the Catholic masses (and, as far as possible, Christians in general) in Europe and with the Italian masses in particular, so as to lay the foundations for preventing them from falling prey to communism once the war was over.

In our opinion, all the main initiatives of the Holy See from the end of September 1942 onwards can be placed within this logic, which was both humanitarian and political. Certainly, the Vatican's diplomatic efforts to try to stop or at least limit the aerial bombardment of German and Italian cities to military targets alone, and in particular to preserve Rome by declaring it an "open city," an interest which, soon became widely known, was one of the main reasons why, in the eyes of the Roman population, Pius XII, as well as being "pastor angelicus," became "defensor urbis" during the months of German occupation, and the Church acquired a prestige it had not enjoyed for a long time and which would have a decisive influence on post-war national politics. The radio message addressed by the pontiff to the world three months later on the occasion of Christmas certainly follows the same logic.

In his previous radio messages, Pius XII had proposed, as he told the cardinals and prelates of the Curia, "to set forth the norms and presuppositions of a new ecclesial order," which he then outlined in detail in his
and prelates of the Curia, "to set out the rules and assumptions of a

responded by asking how America and England could agree on moral, social, and economic plans with Russia, the seat of communism.

Taylor replied that these objections no longer corresponded to the evolution that communism had undergone both as a party and as a state practice.

Many mitigations had been introduced into Soviet doctrine and organization, the principles of communism are now widespread and, in a certain sense, have permeated the consciousness and concepts of the modern world; it was therefore a question of form and adaptation to the individual conditions of the various countries and social groups, which naturally had to be taken into account but which would necessarily lead to a new international order, in the social as well as in the economic and political

true peace among peoples, in accordance, therefore, with justice, equity, and love"; in this, rather than on the possibility of a peace over which he had no influence, the pope focused essentially on the "after peace," on how to avert the danger he now felt was looming: that "humanity," "under the influence of passion," might "replace errors more or less recognized as such with other misguided ideas or simple palliatives, which remedy nothing, instead of initiating a n d promoting without delay a resolute a n d open return to truth and goodness." Hence the combative a n d even imperious tone of the radio message, which provoked Mussolini's sarcasm ("this is a speech full of platitudes that could easily have been made by the parish priest of Predappio"¹), seemed unrealistic to a Catholic fascist like Papini ("the pope r e s e m b l e s someone who, faced w i t h a burning metropolis, makes wise speeches to demonstrate that children should not be entrusted with boxes of matches"²) a n d left even some theologians a n d professors at the Catholic University uncertain o r in disagreement about the possible interpretations of certain passages³ but which organized Catholics (and not only them), especially the younger ones, understood in the sense intended by the pontiff⁴ as a call to rally the laity around Catholic Action and an indication of a more active presence among t h e working classes; all in view of a n d in preparation for a post-fascist era in which Catholics would have to assert their ethical a n d social conception "overcoming the sea of errors of the day and of the times."

in its pacifying comfort, as a promise and hope for a better, more fruitful, and happier future.

It is true that the journey from night to a bright morning will be long, but the first steps on the path are decisive, leading over the first five milestones carved with a bronze chisel with the following maxims:

i) Dignity and rights of the human person... 2) Defense of social unity and especially of the family... 3) Dignity and prerogatives of work... 4) Reintegration of the legal system... 5) Conception of the state according to the Christian spirit.

From this perspective, according to the pontiff, there was no longer any place for fascism in Italy's future. However, this did not mean that he could or wanted to hasten its demise. He had to realize that not only could this not depend on the attitude of the Church, but it would also open up a series of problems that the Church was not yet prepared to face. Hence the need to avoid missteps, not only with the regime (in which, moreover, he was well aware that there were those who were waiting for nothing else), but also with the Allies and Berlin. This probably explains why, when Taylor—who, during the first audience, had told the pope (and later Monsignor Tardini) that "America has no hatred for the Italian people" **a n d** subsequently made it clear that this

"when he could be given adequate help," he would have done well to

"abandon ^{Hitler}"² - speaking with Cardinal Maglione, he had made an indirect attempt to make it clear that he would willingly meet with Ciano "and also... ^{Mussolini}"³, but the Vatican had let *the advance* slip. Just as when, on November 13, in the midst of the controversy over

Prompted by Farinacci's accusations against the Vatican of having contributed to the British decision to bomb the major Italian cities in the north (confirming Taylor's belief that a few bombings would undermine the resistance and confidence of the Italian people), Cardinal Maglione is said to have told Guariglia (to whom he was closely linked) in the utmost secrecy to Guariglia (to whom he was closely linked by friendship) to deny the accusation and demonstrate to him the good faith of the Holy See, which, when Taylor had made "a reference to the possibility of detaching Italy from Germany" to the pontiff, had found "such a frosty reception" that he had not even taken up the subject again with him. At that moment, with Axis troops still stationed in front of El Alamein and German troops on the offensive in Russia, only Taylor could believe that Mussolini or the sovereign, or even Ciano himself, would consider contacting him. Any step to sound out their willingness would not only have been useless, but would have increased Mussolini's irritation and suspicion towards the Church and, if it had leaked out, would have aroused the wrath of the hardliners and the Germans, who were already sufficiently irritated and concerned about Taylor's visit.

At least for the moment, and certainly until around mid-May ¹⁹⁴³, the Holy See—which, moreover, did not approve of the formula of unconditional surrender—preferred therefore not to take action. On February 22, faced with an attempt by Marshal Bastico to sound out the possibility of a military coup that would ensure "order and peace in Italy" and get Italy out of the war, the opportunity was unique, and a meeting in the Vatican was possible. But nothing happened.

to get Italy out of the war. The opportunity was unique, and a meeting in the Vatican was possible. But nothing happened.

The last words Mr. Taylor said to me were: "If the king or crown prince should attempt to contact America in the future, let me know and I will return to Lisbon or, if possible, even Rome, to make these contacts" (E. DI NOLFO, *Vaticano e Stati Uniti 1939-*

put forward the idea of breaking away from Germany and possible Vatican intervention as a mediator with the Allies, Pius XII remained "above the fray, ignoring the issue" and gave no ^{response}. Nor – at least according to the very scarce documentation available – is it likely that, contrary to the rumors circulating at the time, the issue of a separate peace was actually discussed during the various meetings between the Pope and Monsignor Spellman during the latter's visit to the Vatican in the last ten days of February at the Pope's request. The underlying theme of these meetings was probably another: the Pope's desire to obtain first-hand information on the Casablanca Conference and his concerns about Anglo-American policy towards the USSR, the concessions that Washington and London were prepared to make to Moscow in Europe, and the reliability of rumors about possible pressure on the Holy See to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviets.

With regard to Italy, in recent months the realism and timing of Vatican policy have essentially followed the direction indicated by Pius XII's radio message: to revitalize and strengthen Catholic associations, particularly Catholic Action; to help them overcome, through a series of specific initiatives (especially of a moral and religious nature) and activities aimed at studying and disseminating the social doctrine of the Church, the crisis of identity that the events of the early years of the war and (as regards Catholic Action more specifically) the statutory innovations of 1939-40 and, above all, the transfer of leadership functions from the laity to the clergy had often produced; to rally and activate the laity around Catholic Action and its related and collateral organizations (typical cases being Onarmo, which until then had existed mainly on paper and which, at the beginning of 1943, began to spread like wildfire, and Icas, even if its revitalization was slower, so that when the regime fell, the Institute was just emerging from the torpor of previous years); to establish a more active presence among the working classes and laborers; to make the middle class a true moral and political reference point for the future; to stem the de-Christianization of the masses and the rise of their

within "extremist" social and political tendencies, both in the fascist sense and, above all, in the communist sense.

Police sources provide a wealth of information and insights into this activism, allowing us to understand and evaluate both the extent of the phenomenon and the decisive importance of the diocesan and parish leadership and the hundreds of newspapers and bulletins published by them for its success, as well as the variety of reactions it provoked. These include the predictable reactions of Farinacci and the intransigent fascist groups, who saw it as confirmation of what they had been proclaiming for some time, and those of Mussolini, which were ultimately not very different and which, in addition to the references to them in Ciano's diary, a characteristic testimony in the words he uttered on January 23, 1943, in the Council of Ministers^{a n d} in their translation into an explicit diplomatic passage that he had Guariglia carry out in the same days to contest the "political" nature of the press campaign launched after the Pope's Christmas radio message and, in particular, the insistence with which programmatic solutions were proposed which, especially in the social field, ignored the achievements of the regime: as well as those, all in all more significant for us, of those fascists (to give just two examples relating to the fascist leadership, cases such as Riccardo Del Giudice^{a n d} Carlo Ravasio and the part he played in

"Orestano case") who, precisely during this period, began to view the Church and Catholicism with increasing interest—sometimes instrumental, but often genuine—as an element of national unity and a bulwark against communism. From the end of 1942, this concern became increasingly prevalent even in sectors of the industrial world that were far from insignificant, prompting them to encourage or support the work and social initiatives of the clergy, even though they knew these were frowned upon by the regime and often opposed by local party leaders. Finally, in this context, we cannot ignore certain initiatives that were taken - entirely independently - in the secular anti-fascist sphere during this same period and which, while exerting a strong influence in intellectual circles, especially intellectual circles, broader than those to which they had naturally been addressed until then, both because of the gravity of the moment and their *ethical* value, but also because of the 'parallelism' that inevitably arose between them and the new attitude of the Church. It is certainly not without significance that

The most famous and intellectually and morally elevated of these initiatives was Benedetto Croce's famous essay "Why We Cannot Help Calling Ourselves Christians," published in *La Critica* on November 20, 1942, in which the philosopher defined Christianity as "the greatest revolution that humanity has ever accomplished" because it had worked "in the center of the soul, in moral conscience" and had affirmed that "preserving, rekindling, and nurturing Christian sentiment is our ever-recurring need, today more acute and tormenting than ever, between pain and hope"¹. while it garnered widespread approval among secularists and Catholics² and among a good number of moderate fascists and supporters, it aroused the ire of both communists and Mussolini³ and various types of fascists: the uncompromising ones, of course, but also "Fascist criticism" and those who were not insensitive to the tempting demon of convergence, after the war, between Catholics and Communists in an anti-liberal key, thanks to which the Church could have regained its vigor and "true" corporatism could finally be realized.

At this point in our reconstruction, to avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to be very clear. It is necessary to understand why, despite the considerable impetus given by the papal Christmas radio message to the activities of the clergy and the various organizations connected with it, the attitude of Catholics in terms of "public spirit" remained unchanged for several months, and all in all until July 25, such that it was not considered by the police to be substantially different from that of previous months and, later, when the fate of the war for the Axis and for Italy in particular became increasingly dramatic, it was certainly not the most serious aspect of the situation.

To understand how this could have happened, we need to consider a number of characteristics of Italian Catholicism and Vatican policy.

A first, very important aspect is the multiplicity of

positions that characterized the clergy and especially Catholic organizations. The most accurate observations in this regard were made by F. Traniello when, instead of stopping at the surface, he sought to delve deeper into the reality of the moral, cultural, and psychological situation with which the Church's new attitude had to contend:

The call to gather the laity around the established structures of Catholic Action could not compensate for the fact that the Catholic world was not at all equipped at that time to express its own homogeneous political identity. Echoing the papal messages, the most influential bishops repeatedly outlined a post-war order in which God and his law would be placed "at the foundations and peaks of states"; but the means to be used to pursue such an ambitious goal remained undetermined. The paths that the Catholic world tended to follow were mostly of a different nature. Spiritual and material assistance to those who suffered the consequences of the conflict. Active engagement in the field of public "morality." And, furthermore, the search for a social program that would integrate, along the lines of the principles invoked by the papal magisterium, the ideas of different scope and origin that Catholic social thought was debating internally.

This led to uncertainty and often even a multiplicity of ways of understanding the *true* meaning and underlying perspectives of the radio message, not only in what we might broadly define as the "Catholic world" (simplifying greatly and disregarding its profound internal differences), but also within Catholic organizations themselves. This is demonstrated by the fact that on February 26, 1943, the president of Catholic Action Men was forced to ask the commission of cardinals on which Catholic Action itself depended for clarification and guidance on the questions and "multiple and conflicting" interpretations raised by the radio message, particularly regarding its political meaning:

The radio message, wrote Casella³ on this subject, aroused enormous interest in the Catholic world. As in other circles, Pius XII's speech provoked enthusiasm and initiatives within the AC, together with questions and requests for clarification. Responding to the repeated and pressing invitations of Monsignor Colli and the General Directorate, the branches and sections of the Association promoted numerous initiatives of "social acculturation" at the center and in the dioceses.

But Pius XII's radio message did not only inspire initiatives of "social acculturation": it also raised doubts and questions, which led to calls for clarification from many quarters, not least because there were various and contradictory interpretations of the papal message circulating within the Italian Church. What exactly did the pontiff mean? Was the message religious or also

Today, L'Italia would write in turn, there can only be one duty: to form a united front of minds focused on the supreme effort to prevent the shame of enemy domination.

We must have faith in the army and its leaders. The blood of our blood, the youth of Italy, who on the Sicilian beaches oppose the enemy's overwhelming power with a barrier of indomitable and determined hearts, will know how to do their duty because they are driven and sustained by our own anxiety, our own love for our homeland.

We must have faith in God and in His help. Today we are fighting a war that has no other goal than to defend our land, our bread, and our cultural heritage. Justice is clearly on our side today: it deserves every help, and we humbly and ardently implore the Lord of hosts, certain that we will be heard.

The present moment therefore imposes a sacred duty on every Italian: to remain calm and serene, to place their trust in God and in the army, and to give their country all their physical and spiritual strength. This is the moral climate of the great moments in history, those that do not occur in vain in the life of a great people. Italy is now experiencing its great moment and is asking its children to prove themselves worthy of its glorious and magnificent past.

The concepts and exhortations of the "Nuovo cittadino" (New Citizen) would have been no different:

The hearts of Italians reach out to the Sicilian coast and beat as one with the generous fighters who are battling tenaciously to defend the national territory from enemy attack. The hour of trial has come, our largest island has become a zone of operations.

But the hearts of Italians do not tremble: they vibrate down there with even greater determination. They participate in the struggle with unshakeable resolve. If they were already bleeding for the offense against the historical evidence of their history, their civilization, and their faith, they feel even more wounded now that the enemy's foot treads on our land.

But Italians, tempered by centuries of bitterness and uncertainty, have the calm and determination that the hour demands. Arms have been mobilized, spirits have been mobilized. The pride and heroism of the combatants will be matched by the determined will of the entire population to defend their land. Everyone has their role to play in this tough battle, which will decide the fate of the country. The severity of life on the home front will have to be more intimate and more profound. And the best souls - who, since Italy took up arms, have entrusted its fate with enthusiasm and dignity to the God who loves our land - today more than ever, together with all our people, will invoke from the Lord of Hosts that protection which will crown the enthusiasm, daring, and heroism of our combatants on land, in the air, and at sea.

May God protect and save Italy.

Finally, another reason that cannot be underestimated is that not even the Holy See, not even Pius XII, knew exactly how to proceed. They had no clear ideas about what would be the best political organization for Catholics, so much so that among them (including those who would have liked to be given the freedom to join non-Catholic parties, provided they were not prejudicially atheistic) and in

In the Vatican, there were those who thought of a single Catholic party and those who would have preferred a multiplicity of political formations, and the pontiff was particularly concerned with preventing Catholic Action from being dragged into "the vortex of political parties" and the "narrow confines of factions."¹ Nor did they have clear ideas on how to respond to developments in the conflict. This was true both with regard to Italy and the evolution of its internal situation, and in general. As emerges from Father Graham's studies the pope's most fervent aspiration was that the conflict would end as soon as possible, with a peace that was as just as possible, so as to make it more difficult to ignite new hatreds that would have made it precarious, and that would leave as little room as possible for the spread of Soviet hegemony and communism. In other words, this means that Pius XII, even after what Taylor had so explicitly communicated to him, continued to think of a negotiated peace (which would certainly have become even more difficult if, in the meantime, the principle of unconditional surrender had been implemented with regard to Italy) to which the Holy See could contribute by exercising a mediating role. But a negotiated peace required the Holy See to adopt a formally impartial attitude towards the two warring blocs, or at least towards the Anglo-Americans and the Germans. This was certainly not easy to achieve in practice and, with regard to the Germans, would have become very difficult, if not impossible, if the Holy See had exposed itself "negatively" with a hostile attitude towards Mussolini or, worse, by appearing among those who had contributed to the break-up of the Axis and Italy's exit from the conflict.

This complex set of reasons explains why the growing pacifism among the Catholic population, the increasingly marked psychological and moral detachment from the regime, and the revitalization of Catholic organizations essentially translated
 , the increasingly marked psychological and moral detachment from the regime, and the revitalization of Catholic organizations essentially translated into a sort of political wait-and-see attitude that manifested itself first and foremost in the delay with which Catholics—despite the strong and ramified organization of Catholic Action and the support of the clergy—formed a genuine political organization and, until the fall of the regime, moved with great caution in the underground and, except for those of popular origin, in their relations with other parties. — formed a genuine political organization and, until the fall of the regime, moved with great caution in the underground and, except for those of popular origin, in their relations with other underground parties; but which, on closer inspection, also manifested itself in two other ways: as regards groups not linked to tradition and experience po-

polarization, above all through the reaffirmation of a strong tendency that we could define as "integralist" and "project-oriented", rather than strictly political; and for the more intellectual ones (and sometimes with strong populist tendencies), who had been involved in the anti-fascist movement for some years - in some cases even before the start of the Second World War - and had been influenced by communism, through the choice of 'autonomy' and the establishment (or strengthening) of their own political organizations on the left (and often as an alternative) to those that, albeit with difficulty and delays, were being set up by organized Catholics:

In September 1942, Myron Taylor asked Count Dalla Torre for information about anti-fascist parties and the prospects that might open up for Italian politics after the end of the war. To satisfy this request, De Gasperi wrote a short *memorandum*, the first part of which reads as follows:

The anti-fascist opposition consists of four groups:

1. Politicians (former ministers, members of Parliament, senators):
 - a) Liberals;
 - b) Popular (Christian Democrats);
 - c) Social reformists (such as Bonomi, former Prime Minister);
 - d) Socialists.

Generals, such as Badoglio and Caviglia.

Writers, professors, members of the liberal or Catholic aristocracy, such as Prince Doria Panfilì; Duke T. Gallarati Scotti, Count Visconti Venosta, Count Jacini Stefano, Count Casati, Alberto Albertini, B. Croce, De Rug-giero, Calogero, Parri, Calamandrei, Carnelutti, Salvatorelli, Brecchi, Gal-letti, La Pira. Some of these are in prison, such as Calogero and Parri.

- iv . Communists. It is very difficult to assess the real strength of the Communist Party; its leaders and organizers are confined to the island of Ventotene, near Ponza (population, about 2,000), from where they keep in secret contact with their partisans. There are many infiltrations in the war factories.

As can be seen, De Gasperi spoke explicitly of parties only in relation to the Communists; in other cases, he referred to individuals rather than actual parties.

and their own. Given De Gasperi's realism and intellectual scrupulousness, this is hardly surprising: talking about anti-fascist parties in September 1942 would have been, except for the communists, essentially arbitrary. In fact, they did not yet exist, as small groups scattered here and there throughout the country—often, as already mentioned, not even connected to each other, much less to what remained of the old organizations abroad—of former leaders, almost all of them second or third-rate, and former militants of the old anti-fascist parties and intellectuals, even of value, but who—as Calamandrei noted in his diary¹—were generally difficult to consider as anything other than "good people who meet with gusto and almost tenderness to speak ill of fascism and engage in literary gossip." Or, if they existed, they were still in a completely embryonic stage, in the early stages of organization, sometimes divided by unresolved internal conflicts over their own characterization and at odds with each other on fundamental issues, such as the attitude to take towards the monarchy, and subordinate to Victor Emmanuel III, relations with the communists, and Catholicism as the state religion.

¹ The German-Soviet pact, the outbreak of war, and subsequent internal events in France, first and foremost after the armistice of June 1940, had disrupted and virtually wiped out the socialist, republican, and Giellist organizations in France (which, after breaking off relations with the communists, had initially joined forces with the Lidi in an Italian National Committee whose main objectives were to protect Italian emigration and organize a legion of Italian anti-fascist fighters). A number of their leaders had managed to flee to North Africa and from there to the United States and Mexico, while others had reached England or Switzerland, and still others had gone into hiding (especially in the area controlled by the Vichy government), practically giving up all activity. However, several of them were eventually arrested by the German police and handed over to the Italian police (B. Buozzi in 1941, G. Faravelli in 1942, P. Nenni in 1943, etc.); finally, others, tired and discouraged, had returned to Italy (for example, O. Morgari). Among the leaders of democratic anti-fascism, the only one who remained free was Saragat, who on March 3, 1943, signed the Lyon Agreement on behalf of the socialists with the Giellists and communists, which was supposed to develop the agreement previously signed in Toulouse in 1941 after the German attack on the USSR, and aimed at re-establishing the unity of Italian anti-fascism, but which had remained, as far as Italy was concerned, practically a dead letter since the communists of the

The "internal center" had learned of this and communicated it to the socialists and Giellists only a year later.

The socialist leadership, headed by Ignazio Silone, had been established in Switzerland and began operating in September 1941, taking a more intransigent stance towards the communists; however, like the French group, it had not managed to establish effective contacts with Italy. The only truly active democratic anti-fascist group was therefore the one operating in the United States (which revolved around the Mazzini Society and could count on the support of highly prestigious figures such as Borgese, Pacciardi, Salvemini, Sforza, and Sturzo) and which had branches in various other countries in the New World. Apart from the fact that, after June 1941, it too found itself in difficulty due to the diversity of opinions between the most intransigent anti-communists and those who were more open to compromise, and due to the American reluctance to make, beyond a series of fine words, make specific commitments on the future of Italy after the end of fascism, it is also a fact that even this part of the anti-fascist emigration had only very tenuous relations with the anti-fascists in Italy until the end of 1942 (see L. RAPONE, *L'età dei Fronti popolari e la guerra (1941-1944)*, in *Storia del socialismo italiano*, IV, Rome 1981, pp. 371 ff.; G. DE LUNA, *Storia (Lei Partito d'Azione 1942-1947*, Milan 1982, pp. 27 ff.; E. SIGNORI -M. TESORO, *Green and Red. Fernando Schiavetti and the Anti-Fascists in Exile between Republicanism and Socialism*, Florence 1987, pp. 329 ff.; *L'Antifascismo italiano negli Stati Uniti durante la seconda guerra mondiale*, edited by A. Varsori, Rome 1984; A. VARSORI, *Gli Alleati e l'emigrazione democratica antifascista (1940-1944)*, Florence 1982; A. BALDINI - P. PALMA, *Italian Anti-Fascists in America [1942-1944]. The "Legion" in Pacciardi's*

The Socialist Party was formally reconstituted (secretary G. Romita, deputy secretary O. Lizzadri) on September 20, 1942, after a series of contacts in the previous months between some groups of old socialists who had been "dormant" for years in Turin, Milan, Bologna, and especially Rome. In the following months, links were established in other locations; however, the actual reconstitution of the party only really began after July 25 and after Buozzi, Morandi, Nenni, and Pertini were released from prison. The agreement between the various groups was anything but easy and in some cases even impossible: the traditional misunderstandings and mistrust were immediately compounded by new ones, especially with those most closely linked to the experience of Morandi's Centro Interno and those coming from the youth and left-wing fascist movements, who harbored a deep mistrust of pre-fascist socialism. This led to the birth in January 1943 of the Proletarian Unity Movement for Socialist Construction, promoted by

L. Basso and the formation of young former Roman fascists into an autonomous group, the ^{Italian} Proletarian Union.

The situation of the Christian Democrats was not very different. When fascism fell, it too existed almost exclusively on paper as a party. Although the first "political" meetings of the various groups existing in the Catholic field had preceded those of the socialists by a year, the first meeting between the representatives of the most important groups, the Milanese group, mainly inspired by neo-Guelphism, and the Roman group of former populists close to De Gasperi, took place only in the summer of 1942. After that, and after the need to create an autonomous Catholic political movement had finally been proposed in October (and there had been no shortage of uncertainty and controversy over what to call it), it was decided, to devote themselves to the elaboration of what would become the *reconstructive ideas of Christian Democracy* and, once this work was completed in April 1943, to circulate them in Catholic circles.

In the liberal-democratic camp, things had progressed a little more quickly, as evidenced by the fact that, apart from the communists, the first clandestine party newspapers to see the light of day were the liberal Ricostruzione and the actionist Italia libera. However, the overall operational results were not much better. The liberal-democratic camp could count on some of the most prestigious names of the old "Amen-Delian" and Giellist anti-fascism, and Rossellian in particular, on a group of

"young liberals" who would play a significant role in the political events following July 25, numerous intellectuals trained by Croce or Gentile, some representatives of the economic and financial world, as well as some of the most significant figures in whom the Lombard Catholic liberal tradition was still perpetuated. All these men, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees, had lived through the years of the regime in the spirit of the "ethics of rejection," refusing to compromise with it. It was thanks to some of them that a number of young people in high schools and especially in universities were able to draw on a culture and a moral and life concept that was neither fascist nor Catholic. The person who had exerted the greatest and most decisive influence in this field for almost twenty years was Croce, through his works, with 'La critica' (a non-clandestine voice of opposition that was always present throughout the regime), with the example of his attitude, with his personal relationships, through the group of intellectuals, major and minor, often local, who had gathered around him or had made him their point of reference.

With the war, and especially after it had spread to the USSR and the US, the liberal-democratic camp had expanded and attempts had been made within it, initially without significant results, to establish some sort of link between some of its groups; but it had also begun to show some cracks, which, as Italy's situation became more dramatic and the end of the regime drew nearer, became deeper, to the point of undermining its unity and cohesion and causing some of its members to question Croce's primacy and even accusing him of favoring, with his realism and his aversion to moralistic abstractions and palingenetic programs, "political indifference" and even "collaborationism"

Many reasons contributed to this, which cannot be discussed at length here. Naive illusions about the attitude that the Anglo-Americans would "certainly" adopt, in line with the principles and ideals of the fight against Nazi-Fascism, towards "the other Italy," the democratic and anti-Fascist one; a thirst for action, in some cases driven to the most irresponsible recklessness (in early 1943, there were those who advocated an agreement with the Mafia to set fire to the next wheat harvest in Sicily); the resurgence of old, but never forgotten,

Completely dormant, political divisions and rivalries, consciously or unconsciously revived at times in a moralistic key; but above all, the emergence and radicalization of different hypotheses on how to face the future and on the characteristics of the future Italian democracy. Some of these rifts were eventually resolved through mutual sacrifices and compromises (typical examples being those between the Giellisti, Liberal Socialists, and former Amendolians, from which the Action Party was born in June-July 1942), but which, in the years immediately following the end of the war, proved unable to last, resulting, on the one hand, in a drastic downsizing of the role of the "third force," on which so many hopes and energies had initially been pinned, and, on the other hand, leaving the field almost entirely open to the De a n d the Pei, who were opposed a n d in fierce conflict with each other, but at the same time necessary to each other in order to present their function a n d hegemony to the c o u n t r y—the former as a force of power a n d the latter as a force of opposition—as having no possible alternative. Other cracks, however, immediately led to a breakup. In particular, the one that gave rise to the Action Party a n d the rebirth of the Liberal Party, a n d led to the political divorce between Croce and those who joined the former, considered by the philosopher to be dangerous because of its program, both because, especially at that moment, priority had to be given to the 'question of freedom' and the achievement of the broadest possible unity of all 'liberal' energies, while it was to be expected 'that a program of this sort will end up arousing discontent a n d rebellion, a n d will weaken the action for freedom', and, more generally, because "to say that freedom must be at the service of economic reform is to fall back into historical materialism and to agree with Marxist communism, which makes morality a n d politics dependent on the economy and vilifies freedom as a product of the 'bourgeoisie' a n d 'capitalism'." Hence, in 1942, the liberal-democratic camp split into three political formations: liberals, shareholders, and anti-laborists, to which were added t h e republicans, entrenched in their traditional ideological-political positions and who remained aloof from this turmoil.

The only party that already existed at the end of 1942 was actually the Communist Party

. However, its actual presence was very limited, so much so that

G. Amendola, discussing the reorganization of the anti-fascist parties during those months, wrote that, compared to them, the Communist Party was only "a few steps ahead, but not ^{many}."

Until the German attack on the Soviet Union, the Communist Party was practically non-existent. There were only a few scattered groups of militants, who were often unconnected to each other, with no links either to the Moscow headquarters or to what remained of the old Foreign Office, first in France and then in Yugoslavia. Last but not least, the communist reality of those years - disoriented and demoralized at the same time by the unexpected twist of the German-Soviet pact, by the negative reactions it had provoked in some of the militants and sympathizers, and by the news filtering out of prisons and places of confinement about opposition even from old and influential leaders. And, more importantly, isolated in the country.

The most important fact, according to a report presented in 1941 by the Italian delegation to the International², is that these groups are isolated from the masses because they have not followed the changes that have taken place in the country and, in general, are divided from the masses influenced and organized by fascism. It can be added, in particular, that they have no contact with young people.

The German attack on the USSR was an important event for the communists, both in terms of 'clarifying' the political situation and, in some cases, their personal position and commitment to a more decisive and conscious struggle, and in terms of making it easier to re-establish old contacts and establish new ones.

The clarification of the USSR's attitude, Senise immediately observed in a circular sent to prefects, police chiefs, and OVRA inspectors, not only

removed all uncertainty from all communists, both declared and potential, but made it clear that the party leaders had resumed their organizational and, it should be noted, conspiratorial activities, suggesting that the conditions for moving from propaganda to action, if not all then at least in part, had now been met.

It was in fact after June 22, 1941, that U. Massola was sent to Italy in August with the task of rebuilding the party's "internal center" and rallying the ranks of the organization. what remained of the illegal apparatus in Paris was moved to southern France, so as to facilitate contacts with other anti-fascist exiles who were mainly located in that region (with whom contacts were initiated for "a loyal alliance of struggle" between "all political forces willing to fight for the government of the people," as stated on June 23 in an appeal issued by Moscow, contacts that would materialize in the autumn in the "Toulouse appeal" signed with the socialists and the Giellists) and to facilitate links with Italy; some groups of young intellectuals who referred more or less generically to communism and who until then had limited themselves essentially to the study of Marxism, made contact with communist workers and, through them, with the party; and, more generally, a new phase of activity began on the part of both the few militants who made up what remained of the old organizational fabric in Italy and old and new sympathizers who, in the wake of the clash between the Axis and the USSR, rejoined or approached the party for the first time. However, the start of this new phase was slow and the results achieved were less than often claimed. In practice, despite the personal commitment and spirit of sacrifice of the communists, an effective change in the situation began to take shape only in the second half of 1942, after the Axis defeats in Africa, the failure of the German offensive on Stalingrad, the bombing of Italian cities, and the further deterioration of internal living conditions. It only took shape in the early months of 1943, when, among other things, the "internal center" began to function ^{effectively}. However, one should not believe that all this led, both in terms of proselytism and organization, to results that truly affected the reality of the country. From this point of view, in fact, the first real leap in quality (in a metaphorical sense, but also literally, since the foundations of the 'new' Communist Party were laid by the liberation, after the fall of the regime, of what Amendola called 'the Communist reserve' , i.e., the communists who were then in prison or in exile, among whom were many leaders and cadres.

of proven faith and experience) occurred during the forty-five days of the Badoglio government.

Despite having expanded its organizational base (especially in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Emilia), the Communist Party,

In the spring of 1943, it had secure connections only with a few cities and regions; the entire south remained outside the network of connections maintained by the Internal Center, except for a few sporadic contacts with Naples and Sicily, and most of central Italy. Proof of the organizational weakness is provided by the fact that after the arrests in Milan in April, the Center had only primitive makeshift means, found with difficulty in Emilia, at its disposal for printing *L'Unità*.

And in areas where it had a greater presence, it was very scarce even among factory workers. According to the most reliable data, in Turin there were 80 militants at Fiat Mirafiori (out of 21,000 workers), about 30 at Lancia, about 60 at Viberti, and ⁷²² at Aeronautica. Again according to the most reliable data and estimates, on the eve of July 25, the party had "a few thousand" active militants, most likely no more than 4-5,000, who were effectively connected to it, to which must be added a certain number of groups, some of "uncertain political orientation" (it was from these that movements such as *Stella Rossa*, *Scintilla*, *Bandiera Rossa* and others of Trotskyist or Bordigist orientation arose), partly spontaneous or formed - especially in 1942-43 - around old communists who had been released from prison or exile or had returned to clandestine activity after years of 'dormancy' and were not connected to the party. Between those connected and those not, there were a total of about ten thousand "communists"³ a good number of whom however, were identified and arrested by the police,⁴ who in their reports and in their periods-

that reports from early 1942 increasingly pointed to a "revived vitality" of anti-fascism and communism in particular (the latter term was often used generically to refer to any kind of

"subversives"). In short, even though they were more numerous, better organized, and generally better prepared for clandestine activity than other anti-fascists, the results that the communists managed to achieve even after the fall and winter of 1942 were modest overall, especially where one might have expected them to be greater. While L'Unità, the underground press, and the slogans spread by the communists called on soldiers to desert and rebel, they urged the proletariat to engage in obstructionism, to carry out acts of sabotage, and even to take up arms (and in some cases, attempts were made, without much success, to obtain weapons and explosives). the party's 'mass' activity was largely reduced to propaganda, in particular the distribution of leaflets and the writing of slogans on walls.

March-April 1943, almost all against communists, especially in Milan and Venezia Giulia; and May-June 1943, which targeted not only communists, but also shareholders and Christian communists. Another useful point of reference is the trend in the number of political internees, the vast majority of whom were communists (ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General of Public Security, General Affairs and Reserves Division, Political Internment*, p. 22, left "Table of movements of internees"):

against Mussolini and the ^{regime}. This activity was not very different from that carried out by various spontaneous groups, both "communist" (which, with the multiplication of Soviet successes, benefited from the "spread of considerable admiration for Russia")² as generically anti-fascist groups present in many localities and which - given the still embryonic state of the reconstitution of the parties³ and the lack of bite of communist activity itself - constituted, from the second half of 1942 onwards, certainly until March-April 1943, but in practice until July 25, the most important phenomenon of the internal situation as regards opposition to the regime.

Spriano drew attention to this phenomenon, but gave it an overly broad and generic characterization, insufficient to fully convey its peculiarity and significance with respect to the situation of the

1942-43:

The phenomenon that presents original characteristics is the emergence, between 1941 and 1943, of a spontaneous opposition which, in the absence of a widespread network of party organization, tends to form a first network of resistance among workers, students, intellectuals, and even in the countryside. An investigation conducted with the help of archival sources shows that the phenomenon was widespread. There has been much talk of a proliferation of these groups that refer to socialism, communism, freedom, or a combination of all three.

Too broad and generic because a distinction must be made between the groups that existed between 1941 and the end of 1942 and those that arose in the last months of 1942 and early 1943, taking into account the different moments in which they were formed and, therefore, the different perspectives of their anti-fascism, the different social backgrounds of many groups formed in the last months of the regime compared to those of the previous ones, and the different experiences

political and cultural characteristics that defined them. Insufficient because it does not address the underlying reasons for the spontaneity that was at the basis of both the groups active in 1940-42 and those that arose in the second half of 1942 and early 1943, but which can only be understood by clearly understanding its connection with the evolution of the internal situation on which the formation of the groups themselves largely depended, their character, and the type of anti-fascism they espoused.

The "spontaneity" of the early years of the war was essentially a consequence of the almost complete absence of anti-fascist organizations to refer to and the difficulty (and, until the attack on the USSR, sometimes the refusal) to make contact with the few existing communist groups. In this early period, most groups were formed around former left-wing militants and mainly attracted people from working-class backgrounds. Their activities were modest in terms of both quantity and quality, and almost never made an impact on the surrounding communities. This is proven by the fact that they did not arouse excessive concern among the police and by the relatively small number of arrests, indictments, and convictions in the first two years of the war. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that almost all the spontaneous groups that arose during this period were essentially a marginal phenomenon, to be seen more in terms of 'public spirit' than as a manifestation of concrete clandestine action against the fascist regime; a phenomenon that was unable to influence the internal situation even at the grassroots level, where these groups generally sought to operate. This was not only due to their intrinsic weakness and the vigilance of the police apparatus, but also

¹ There are no scientific studies on these groups. For the social background of their members and of "spontaneous" anti-fascism, useful information, albeit only indicative, can be gleaned from an examination of the proceedings before the Special Court and the related judgments, as well as from the orders of confinement and internment (see A. DAL PONT - A. LEONETTI - P. MAIELLO - L. ZOCCHI, *Courtroom IV. All the trials of the Fascist Special Court*, Rome 1961; A. DAL PONT - S. CAROLINI, *Dissident and Anti-Fascist Italy. Ordinances, Preliminary Judgments, and Judgments in Chambers Issued by the Fascist Special Court against Defendants Accused of Anti-Fascism from 1927 to 1943*, III: 1940-1943, Milan 1980; ID., *LT-Italia al confino. Orders of assignment to confinement issued by provincial authorities from November 1926 to July 1943*, 4 vols. Milan 1983; *"Pericolosi nelle contingenze belliche" (Dangerous in Wartime). Internees from 1940 to 1943*, edited by S. Carolini, Rome 1987).

Based solely on data relating to cases heard by the Special Court, the following summary can be drawn:

	1940	1941	1942	1943
Workers	164	160	226	70
Farmers	20	42	39	5
Merchants	7	21	20	9
Clerks	14	43	32	8
Professionals	16	29	20	—
Students	6	27	53	13
Other activities 0 not detected	8	18	46	12

also because of the indifference and even hostility that often surrounded them, the mistrust and rebelliousness of the masses, including the workers (remember what was stated in this regard in the report on the "economic and political-social situation in Italy" drawn up in 1941 by the Italian representatives to the Communist International) to heed their exhortations and give them credit^{a n d}, more generally, because of the widespread conviction, not only among the middle classes but also among the working classes, that in the end success would smile on the Axis. The most explicit in recognizing this and, therefore, in implicitly distinguishing the problem of the "public spirit" and its fluctuations over time from that of anti-fascism, at least until the second half of 1942, was Giorgio Amendola.

He wrote⁽²⁾ that the discrediting of fascism, the growing decline in Mussolini's prestige, the unease caused by the suffering imposed by the war, the bombings, and the disgust at the conspicuous phenomena of draft dodging and the black market

other types, particularly those related to food supplies) directly or indirectly falling within the jurisdiction of the Special Court had the following trend in 1940-43:

	1940	1941	1942	1943
Orders				
Defendants	142	257	301	416
referred to the Special Court	1	15	-	29
referred to the ordinary				
and military courts	105	168	171	326
no case to answer	36	73	126	61
Preliminary rulings				
Defendants	242	123	214	79

However, this was not accompanied by the organization of an anti-fascist resistance movement. And the prospect of Nazi Germany's victory weighed heavily on everyone, which seemed, to most, a certainty in 1940, and again in 1941 and the first half of 1942.

The fact that the war ended with the victory of the anti-fascist coalition dispelled the memory of what still seemed, in 1942, after the great German advances on the southern Soviet front, as far as the Caucasus, and after the failure to establish a second front, to be the possibility of a Hitler victory. In the summer of 1942, Japan expanded its occupation to Indonesia and the Pacific islands. In North Africa, Rommel had led German-Italian forces to El Alamein. Certainly, for the more discerning, the failure of the German landing in England in the summer of 1940, the victorious defense of Moscow in the fall of 1941, and the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 were facts that helped to understand how the outcome of the war could be different from that indicated by official propaganda. But how many were able to see, in the depths of the night, the first signs heralding the dawn of a new day?

This situation began to change only in the second half of 1942, and with it some characteristics of the clandestine anti-fascist groups. Before looking at what this change consisted of, however, it is worth mentioning a particular issue that may help to clarify the characteristics and development of the "public spirit" and anti-fascism in the first three years of the war.

In October-November 1939, the British Foreign Office, Ministry of Information, and Ministry of War studied the types of action and propaganda best suited to "developing the goodwill of those responsible for controlling the press" and ^{Italian} public opinion. Between September and December of the following year, the issue was thoroughly re-examined: with Italy's entry into the war, it took on entirely new connotations and, above all, was no longer limited to propaganda, which, as mentioned above, was largely entrusted to the BBC and, in particular, to Radio London broadcasts. For the rest, considering IT-

discontent, economic disorganization" and interrupt the flow of supplies (especially coal) from ^{Germany}¹ and create - as stated in a document dated June 1941 prepared for the joint general staff² - "the anarchy of Ireland in 1920 and Palestine in 1936."

These directives remained essentially in force until the end of 1942 and early 1943, when London, having better defined its political line towards Italy, sought to establish more active contacts with some small groups of anti-fascists (generally Giellists or members of the "liberal left," but also socialists) and, above all, with the Slovenian resistance movement in Venezia Giulia, to whom it also supplied a certain quantity of explosives and incendiary material. Overall, however, the British soon realized that there was no effective organized opposition to leverage and no real leader to oppose Mussolini. Initial contacts with anti-fascists proved much more difficult than expected. As stated in a summary report by the last SOE commander in Italy, "the opposition elements in the country understood that the time had not yet come to take risks in the open" As for those who were in neutral countries or had been taken prisoner in Africa, they were either too absorbed in their political maneuvers and squabbles or were unwilling "to risk returning to their country as British agents to lead a clandestine life in cities infested with police." The British clandestine network of informants and saboteurs operating in Italy, particularly in the southern regions, thus had to rely mainly on paid agents or British nationals who had landed from submarines or parachuted in. They managed to carry out various sabotage missions but achieved considerably less than had long been believed in London, because the SIM - especially after it captured a British agent in 1941 and persuaded him to switch sides in exchange for his life - was able to get its hands on more than seventy other agents and

intercept most of the shipments of explosives made almost weekly by ^{the British}. Nor did infiltration of military circles, especially those of the Army and Air Force (we will not go into the *vexed question* of the Navy for the moment), or more strictly political infiltration aimed at encouraging and stirring up opposition to the regime in the country, yield better results. In this field, Radio London's broadcasts were the only effective, but not decisive, tool, given that, while they contributed significantly to the delegitimization of the regime and Mussolini himself, to the growth of distrust in victory and hostility towards the Germans and, therefore, to the desire for peace, they only succeeded in very few cases in translating these feelings into a commitment to struggle. This was the case with the British; as for the Americans, they too achieved equally modest results in 1942, with the sole exception of Sicily, where they were able to benefit from the support of the Mafia and some separatist groups, some of which were left-wing and had been existing and active abroad even before the outbreak of the war most of which were formed or re-formed on the island during the war years almost always thanks to the help

¹ See c. AMÉ, *Guerra segreta in Italia* (Secret War in Italy), pp. 152 ff. and 161 ff.; M. DE LEONARDIS, *La Gran Bretagna e la resistenza partigiana in Italia* (Great Britain and the Partisan Resistance in Italy), p. 63.

² In February 1942, the SOE reported to the Foreign Office that the Italian armed forces were "in a state of great confusion" and that in the event of serious disturbances of public order, it was unlikely that they would join the police in repressing them, but that, all things considered, the most likely scenario was that, "in the absence of directives from any important and popular figure," they would follow the path of desertion rather than revolt (see P. SEBASHAN, *I Servizi segreti speciali*

of the Mafia¹ which, while waiting to completely rebuild its ranks, partly destroyed by fascism, and to better assess the situation that would arise with Italy's defeat, used separatism as an ideological-political cover.

From the specific perspective of the anti-fascist politicization of the "public spirit" - which is the issue we are interested in focusing on here - of all the initiatives implemented by the Allies, only Radio London broadcasts had an effective, albeit - we repeat - not decisive, impact, especially from the end of 1940 and even more so after the end of 1942, when the psychological condition of the country suffered a definitive collapse. However, as we have said, this collapse did not translate into a commitment to anti-fascist struggle in the vast majority of cases, but rather into a sort of waiting for something that, no one knew how or on whose initiative, would break the deadlock.

And it is this particular state of anticipation among the masses that we must refer to in order to understand the differences between the "spontaneity" of the pre-existing anti-fascist groups and those that were formed in various ways at the end of 1942. The cause and effect of this were, on the one hand, the lack, not to say the absence, of 'a widespread network of party organizations' capable of providing effective guidance, aggregation, and political mobilization of popular discontent and opposition to the war and the regime and, on the other hand, the mobilization of both old anti-fascists dissatisfied with the slow pace of party reconstruction and their political hierarchy or who, in any case, felt that the primary need of the moment was to break out of passivity and direct their actions outside the traditional circles of "those who had never bowed down" and had had nothing to do with fascism, and the mobilization of a new anti-fascist generation, often made up of young people who had grown up under fascism (and who had sometimes been fascists themselves) and who knew little or nothing about the pre-fascist parties, did not understand their divisions and in some cases had no sympathy for them, and were essentially motivated by a need for Italy to regain its freedom and finally emerge from the war, and felt a moral duty to commit themselves personally without getting bogged down in too many prejudices and tactics that only delayed the moment of liberation. A moral and psychological attitude

airports, economic problems were more serious and thousands of people "are on the brink [of starvation] and are living in poverty." The "civil servant issue" was a "bubble that is deflating." In any case, he said, you should know that this measure is my own personal initiative. Reduced to its natural volume, it involves a hundred people, perhaps a few hundred out of 60,000 state officials. But it is not to bring Sicilian senior officials to the mainland, it is to bring officials from other provinces to finally get to know Sicily and Sicilians, and I will kick them in the shins because they are resistant. This is significant and shows how necessary the measure was. Now, only complete idiots could interpret this measure as one that could make Italians suspicious of Sicilian patriotism. Coming from me, this is simply absurd, because no one knows better than I how deep, tenacious, and strong the Sicilians' feelings of patriotism and Italian identity are" (see *Report to the Duce*, pp. 62 ff. and 68 ff.).

The latter, *incidentally*, explains why many of these young people (and not only young people) would soon end up joining the Communist Party, attracted above all by its greater capacity for action and its "realism," or rather, the "new" Action Party.

In addition to the greater number of people involved or in some way affected, the anti-fascist groups of this period differed from their predecessors especially in terms of the social background and age of those who belonged to them or were in contact with them. They were not so much old left-wing militants of mainly working-class origin, but rather middle-class people, particularly intellectuals and young people, often university and high school students, and even young soldiers.

Police reports are, in this regard, full of specific information and observations as well as general assessments, the increasing frequency of which serves as a sort of barometer of the spread of these groups and their gradual assumption of greater importance both in relation to what remained of the pre-existing groups and to those laboriously expressed directly by the parties in the process of re-constitution. One characteristic example is this note on 'subversive and anti-fascist activity' in December 1942 in the province of Venice, which is echoed and confirmed in numerous others, especially in the central and northern regions:

The old subversive movement continues to appear disorganized, but a determined anti-fascist position is forming among youth groups, especially university students, and the bourgeoisie, which, rejecting programmatic party decisions, hopes and expects a overthrow of the regime through military or dynastic movements.

It is possible that isolated acts of aggression against the State may occur under these circumstances, but it does not seem possible that large-scale movements could be organized, given the impossibility of serious organization in the face of various controls by State and Party organs, and the almost total lack of weapons in private hands.

At the beginning, generally not too concerned, month after month the tone of the reports became increasingly alarmed (the "Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of February 28, 1943-xxi"² summarizing the situation would define in no uncertain terms the student environment and "the intellectual environment in general" as "treacherous"), often revealing less concern for the 'violent subversive propaganda' among the masses, the 'increasingly intense' spread of wall writings, leaflets, newspapers, and clandestine 'pamphlets' 'inciting revolt against the Regime and separate peace' to

work of "unspecified organizations" (National Action Front, Italian National Anti-Fascist Union, Revolutionary Committee, Italian Committee for Peace and Freedom, Faith, Italy, Freedom, etc.), whose characteristics and origins were difficult for the police and carabinieri to establish, so that they generally tended to place them within the usual patterns of traditional

"anti-fascist subversion" and "communism," without realizing that in many cases they had been formed not only spontaneously, but on bases that had little in common with those of traditional parties, and even for attempts at anti-fascist infiltration in the armed forces, which were not as widespread as among intellectuals and young people. To understand both the alarm caused by what was happening among intellectuals and young people, and how, at this point, the regime's repressive apparatus was no longer able to control the situation as it had in the past and, above all, to understand it, and therefore attributed to the activities of the anti-fascist parties what was instead mainly the result of the autonomous awareness of increasingly numerous sectors of the bourgeoisie, which until then had not even conceived of the idea of being able to fail in the patriotic duty imposed on the whole country by the state of war in the name of other more concretely patriotic and national values. It is symptomatic what we read in the aforementioned report by the General Directorate of the P.S. on the internal situation during April 1943; in a document that one would expect, after the strikes of the previous month and their aftermath still active in early April in Milan, Reggio Emilia, and Vercelli, to focus primarily on the situation of the workers:

Intense organizational activity continues in all sectors of anti-fascism, which above all attempts to draw young people into the orbit of subversive propaganda, shaking them out of their apathetic attitude with tempting promises of the fulfillment of ambitious individual aspirations or by feeding the fears - common to many young people - of soon having to give up the joyful life of public gatherings to serve their country in gray-green uniforms.

The deleterious work of political agitators tends to spread rapidly, especially in student circles, where restlessness and yearning for new situations, even if anachronistic, more easily and deeply disturb the spirit.

As in the university environments of Florence and Padua—already under close surveillance—traces of subversive organizations have been identified in the university environment of Naples, where arrests and detentions have been necessary.

In Assisi, an initial attempt to form a decidedly subversive organization is currently being investigated, involving mainly young people, to whom weapons are also said to have been distributed.

In the province of Catania, intellectuals are cautiously attempting to start a separatist movement, but they have been identified and are being closely monitored.

To understand why, even after the strikes in March-April, the police considered (and, despite the "depressing" effect of increasingly heavy aerial bombardments, continued to consider until the invasion of Sicily, if not until July 25) the attitude of intellectuals and young people (bourgeois) to be more worrying than that of the working classes and workers themselves, it is necessary to refer to the attitude, *the^z-mus* with which the very particular circumstances in which the intervention took place in June 1940 were experienced by and within the various social classes and groups, and to its subsequent evolution and differentiation (beginning especially in the winter of 1940-41) with respect to the war and the regime.

Among the various social classes, those who had suffered the most, economically, psychologically, but above all morally, and, all things considered, whether they were fascists, anti-fascists, or non-fascists, were the middle and lower middle classes. This is hardly surprising. Although in different ways depending on their attitude towards the regime and the ethical and political values that underpinned it, the relationship between the bourgeoisie – the true and largely sole political and moral protagonist of national unification and the 1915-18 war, of which it had been the soul and driving force, bringing together around it more or less consistent, but certainly not decisive, fringes of other backgrounds – and the nation state it had built and placed at the center of its culture was in fact one of almost total identification. This was all the more so in the face of a conflict which, while its scope and epochal significance for Europe and the world was not fully understood, appeared increasingly likely to jeopardize the nation state itself, if not in terms of its very existence, then certainly in terms of the idea that the vast majority of the bourgeoisie had of it and its historical function. Another important element to consider was the impact that the First World War had had on the Italian bourgeoisie at all levels, but especially at the middle and lower levels. On the one hand, the war had been "the greatest triumph in our history" and "the supreme test of the political stability of the state that emerged from the Risorgimento"¹ and, therefore, the victory of the ideals for which the bourgeoisie had fought for a century and of the ruling class it represented. On the other hand, the extraordinary effort that the war had imposed on the country in all fields, the centrifugal forces it had fueled and only minimally integrated into the national structure, and the contrast between Italy's *status* (and ambitions) as a great power and its actual resources had made the traditional weaknesses of the Italian state more evident, the limitations of the bourgeoisie and the country's deficient civic education, over which the bourgeoisie and the ruling class it represented had – with a few commendable exceptions – drawn a veil of modesty for years, relying on a sort of homeopathic cure based on a gradualism without backbone and, not infrequently, on the belief that time would solve everything.

The crisis of the immediate post-war period, through its two successive phases, *red* and *black*, had prevented the bourgeoisie from gathering its strength and promoting a new and real moral unity in the country and, above all, had undermined its cohesion, exhausting its moral forces even before its political ones and highlighting some of its "historical" limitations.

See R. ROMEO, *L'Italia liberale* cit., p. 353.

background. Finally, the victory of fascism, despite being, and even more apparently, its expression and recognition of its moral and civil function, had further deepened this rift and extended it to the traditional and emerging elites and to the ruling class as a whole. This was not only a *not* so much because of its political cohesion and its attitude towards the fascist state, but also and above all because of its moral world, its basic culture. Hence a progressive deterioration and dulling of the ability of large sections of the bourgeoisie to seriously address—whether they accepted it or not—the problem of fascism, its meaning, its possible developments, the danger it could pose to the historical function it attributed to *its* nation-state and to its own interests, to its social hegemony, to its way of understanding collective and personal life; its acceptance and, to a large extent, its promotion in an increasingly uncritical and often contradictory manner, privileging above all aspects such as the 'enhancement' of the state and the nation (and, at its lowest levels, populism) or those that were or seemed to be to its advantage and in line with some of its ambitions, aspirations, and social grievances (both domestic and international). This was happening while three trends were taking shape that in the 1930s would contribute significantly to further undermining its cohesion and accelerating, on the one hand, its massification and, on the other, the disarticulation, transformation, and redistribution of its *elites*. The first of these trends was the regime's push for the rapid and, as far as possible, total nationalization of the working and peasant masses and their moral and material enhancement—at the expense of the bourgeoisie—implemented by certain sectors of fascism, within which there were groups that—whether sincerely or demagogically, it matters little here—supported the need for such a drive with a whole series of more or less explicitly anti-bourgeois arguments. The second trend, which had already been underway for some time but became much more pronounced during this period, was a growing divide within the bourgeoisie between its more traditional and 'humanistic' sectors, its more modern and 'technical' sectors, and its more strictly technocratic sectors. The former were essentially static and 'rhetorical', linked, despite their adherence to fascism, to old cultural and social models, and increasingly marginalized day by day; the other two were more concretely sensitive to progress, dynamic, in some cases even critical of fascism (but which they nevertheless considered an element of modernity and dynamism, available to promote their social growth and their projects); but convinced of the need for effective modernization of Italian society, thanks to which it could solve its most long-standing economic problems.

social issues, keep pace as much as possible with the progress of the most advanced nations, and make Italy a new country and a truly great power. Finally, the third trend was generational. Criticism and protest against the bourgeois spirit, mentality, and culture by more or less large sectors of bourgeois youth were certainly not new. However, it is a fact that, especially in the 1930s, they manifested themselves in forms and to an extent that had never been seen before (and which, on closer inspection, would remain unsurpassed for thirty years) and that, starting from a strong, albeit often unorthodox, fascist prejudice, they undermined the cohesion of the lower and middle classes, sowing 'moral' uncertainties, motives for contradiction, etc., so as to make increasingly large sectors of society receptive to fascism and Mussolini in particular, soften the reservations of those less receptive, and increasingly dull their critical spirit. To these three trends, a fourth must be added, which did not have time to take root, but which is nevertheless very important both for a better understanding of certain reactions and criticisms of the fascist ruling class during the war years and because it shows how certain phenomena are typical of all totalitarian regimes, whatever their ideology: the tendency to form around fascist power and, in the words of Ugo Spirito to serve its "arbitrary" power, a "new bourgeois class" of political-bureaucratic extraction, with its own particular and eminently conservative interests.

In this context, first thanks to the Conciliation and the policy of containment of the repercussions of the "great crisis" on the Italian economy, then, driven by the enthusiasm aroused by the conquest of Ethiopia (and the "victory" over the "selfishness of the sanctioning nations"), the vast majority of the bourgeoisie increasingly identified Italy with the fascist regime and above all with Mussolini, silencing for the moment all or almost all the doubts and criticisms that even a part of it harbored. The intervention in Spain and, even more so, the rapprochement with Germany, which culminated in the 'free hand' granted to Hitler over Austria (for many, little less than a 'betrayal' of the 600,000 dead who had paid the price for Italy to reach its natural borders), the introduction of racial legislation and the 'Pact of Steel', had considerably dampened much of the enthusiasm, multiplied criticism and perplexity, and aroused considerable concern. Significant in this regard is the plebiscite of approval Mussolini received for his "peacemaking" intervention in Munich; an approval which, moreover, gave him

events of the last months of 1938 and the first half of 1939 had largely dissolved. In this swing of moods (because that is what it was very often and not a conscious and deep-rooted awareness, because Mussolini's prestige remained almost intact despite everything and criticism, perplexity, and concerns, even the most vivid ones, generally ended up breaking against it and the question it raised: 'What if he is right this time too? ...'), the Duce's decision, once war had broken out, to proclaim 'non-belligerence' was greeted with relief and fueled hopes that Italy would remain outside a conflict that immediately brought back memories of the sacrifices and horrors of the war just twenty years earlier, which everyone knew Italy was unable to face because it was completely unprepared and which most considered contrary to national interests. This was the case at least until the collapse of France, which, as we have said and repeated, had caused a profound change, in many cases a complete reversal of opinion regarding Italy's participation or non-participation in the conflict and also its alliance with Germany.

This change, however, as we have already mentioned, had already taken place. mainly because they were convinced that the war would last only a few weeks, a few months at most, and that Italy would reap abundant rewards from it with almost no effort and no risk. A few thousand deaths would be enough to change Italy's position, its "destiny": in this, the vast majority of the bourgeoisie did not think differently from Mussolini, who, however—it must be acknowledged—had been moved to decide on intervention by other considerations and, above all, had a much less rosy view of the "post-victory" period. It is not without significance that in the first weeks of the war, a large number of young people (and their families) tried to avoid being called up, mainly because they were worried about 'wasting time', delaying their studies, and interrupting their normal lives. It is therefore not surprising that, as soon as victory began to fade and the war, which had started almost as a game, became "real" and harsh and began to be felt even at home, in everyday life, and in particular after the first resounding defeats in Greece and Taranto, the moral and civil inconsistency of the state of mind that had accompanied the intervention in large sections of the bourgeoisie immediately came to light and that - with a new change - the initial dreams and "ardour" very often quickly turned into concern, discouragement, and impatience, giving way to criticism and accusations that were undoubtedly well-founded, but which would have been much more justified in June, and if they had been followed by behavior (in an anti-fascist or fascist sense, which is, for the purposes of our discussion, of little importance).

many) consistent with the gravity of the tragedy that was unfolding. Because, while it is true that part of the bourgeoisie had reacted by postponing everything to the 'moral duty' owed to the country at war, another part - certainly no less substantial and destined to increase as the war dragged on and the sacrifices it imposed increased - had instead taken refuge behind the screen of the 'imposed' war, to which it was necessary to adapt, but from which it was possible to escape to some extent by resorting to various expedients and stratagems, even deriving possible benefits from them.

A similar reaction had also occurred during the 1915-18 war; at that time, however, it had manifested itself later and, as a consequence above all of the fatigue and sacrifices caused by the protracted conflict, it had been smaller in scale and, above all, had not led to doubts about the final outcome of the war, so much so that the defeat at Caporetto had been a salutary wake-up call that had prompted the bourgeoisie to gather its energies and join forces to avert the danger of a national catastrophe, both militarily and internally. Twenty years later, things turned out very differently. This was all the more so because, while in 1915-18 the war had been deeply felt by the bourgeoisie as a 'national war' and, therefore, as their own, which meant that the initial divisions between neutralists and interventionists were quickly silenced and reabsorbed by most of them, now, however, as soon as the war became 'real' and harsh, not only did the concerns and criticisms of the eve of war re-emerge and become more dramatic, but the frustrations and fears about the course of the conflict were compounded by those about the social consequences it could have for the bourgeoisie itself, both in the event of defeat and in that of victory. In the former case, the danger was seen - especially after the conflict spread to the USSR

- in a "red" revolution far more serious than the one experienced in the early post-war period. But even in the second case, large sections of the bourgeoisie did not expect anything much better. And not only those whom the fascists used to call "remnants of the past," who had not really accepted fascism, but also among the more "healthy," i.e., more fascist bourgeoisie, there were those who were concerned about the social consequences that a victory of the Axis would have for them. Characteristic of this, although somewhat exaggerated for the sake of argument, is what Ugo Spirito wrote in his *Guerra rivoluzionaria (Revolutionary War)* in mid-1941:

A first gap exists between the older and younger generations, namely between those educated in a democratic climate and those who have experienced the revolutionary war from the outset.

Fascist resistance. The struggle fought internally, and resolved with the victory of revolutionary demands, is now being fought on an international level, where only internal revolution can find its touchstone and reach full maturity. But it is clear that yesterday's defeated are now seeking, in the greater contest, the victory that eluded them. They are the remnants of the past who expect from the enemy what they were unable to defend and triumph with their own forces: disruptive elements, but relatively harmless, because their inability to assert themselves has already been proven by the failure to which they have succumbed. And people who live on the margins, locked in their own physical and family individuality, who limit themselves to murmuring and defending themselves, through hoarding, from the restrictions imposed by the war. Spiritually dead people who struggle to survive physically.

But beyond this, there is another, much more serious gap between the various forms of the old and new bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which is increasingly aware of the revolutionary value of fascism. There is a bourgeoisie, in fact, that has seen fascism as its salvation and has not believed in its revolutionary nature: there is another bourgeoisie that has grown or strengthened itself by speculating on fascism and which, faced with a conflict that is proving more revolutionary every day, stands in solidarity with the former and merges with it. This bourgeoisie is the real misunderstanding of the current situation and the main reason for the disorientation in engaging in the struggle. It understands that its fortune is linked to the existence of a bourgeois form of civilization and knows that this form can only be saved, and only relatively, by the victory of democracies. Fascist as long as fascism was a bulwark against Bolshevism, it is now anti-fascist because fascism is also becoming a bulwark against democracies. Now that fascism is forced to clarify its position on the international stage and make a definitive decision regarding capitalist regimes, the bourgeoisie is retreating and showing increasingly obvious signs of unease. Politically committed to collaboration, it does not know how to separate responsibilities and continues the game despite itself, forced to destroy itself with its own hands. Disoriented, it increases the disorientation, vainly hoping for a miracle that will stop the revolutionary process.

All in all, it was the military, especially those in the operational zones, and not the home front, who best coped with the drama of war. Remember what Monsignor Bartolomasi, the military ordinary, wrote almost on the eve of the Allied landing in Sicily: — it was the military, especially those in the areas of operation, and not the home front, and, despite its vaunted patriotism, more than the bourgeoisie as a whole, the other social classes, even if for them, rather than tension, moral commitment, and true patriotism, we must speak above all of a sort of sense of

(somewhat fatalistic) sense of responsibility, a habit—typical of the popular culture of non-industrial societies—of doing one's job conscientiously and with dignity, and a strong sense of solidarity toward members of one's community.

Let us be clear: we do not mean to say that the entire bourgeoisie proved itself inferior during World War II compared to how it had behaved during World War I, or even deficient from an ethical and political standpoint, lacking that "sense of duty" and "dignity" that alone can command the respect of one's adversaries and which Benedetto Croce — despite his reluctance stemming from his anti-fascism and hostility to the fascist war, but thinking of the image and self-image of Italians when it was over a n d the regime with it — did not cease, until the moment when continuing the war would have been ruinous a n d a betrayal of patriotic ideals, to point out the importance t o those who asked him for a code of conduct. Even during the Second World War, the bourgeoisie, in all its strata, gave proof of moral seriousness, civic education, and patriotism on the battlefields as well as on the home front, no less than it had given in 1915-18 a n d which - when political ideals did not correspond to moral imperatives - must have cost it much more. It is right a n d proper to say this. However, from a historical point of view, it would be profoundly wrong—to the point of rendering incomprehensible not only the events we are dealing with, but also those following the end of the war—to lump everyone together and evaluate their overall behavior on the basis of that of only one part of them, a n d certainly not the most numerous.

The truth is, on the one hand, that the war highlighted and, in some cases, exacerbated the ethical, political, and civic education deficiencies that historically characterized large sectors of the bourgeoisie and that fascism had been unable, and sometimes unwilling, to overcome. On the other hand, these deficiencies often resurfaced during the war and caused

¹ While U. Spirito's analysis of the attitude of the bourgeoisie in *Guerra rivoluzionaria (Revolutionary War)* undoubtedly contains a grain of truth, what Spirito wrote immediately afterwards (p. 68) about the proletariat is unacceptable:

The proletariat, on the other hand, appears increasingly focused and up to the task, although it is weighed down by the influence of underground propaganda from the bourgeoisie. Only for the fascist proletariat, in fact, do the two aspects of the war coincide with the same immediacy as they did for the bourgeoisie of the democracies. These a r e t h e two extremes of revolutionism a n d conservatism, both free from misunderstanding a n d disorientation: irreconcilable adversaries a n d true protagonists of the present conflict. The European fascist proletariat feels that this war is its own a n d fights it with a seriousness a n d discipline that ultimately impose themselves on the bourgeoisie itself. It feels this almost instinctively a n d without realizing it exactly, but revolutionary consciousness matures very quickly. The bourgeoisie still deludes itself a n d tends t o judge the rhetoric a n d hypostasis of the proletariat a n d its political maturity, but the illusion cannot last long. The example of the war of 1914 a n d the post-war period leaves no room for doubt: the war process is a fast-paced school in which the proletariat coexists with the bourgeoisie as never before and makes its problems and aspirations its own.

feel their negative influence on the behavior of even those sectors that had begun to overcome them, but now found it psychologically and materially useful to adapt to the climate determined by the former. And in saying this, mind you, we are not referring only to *the* generic middle-class *standard*, but also to a large part of the ruling class in the broad sense. This helps to better understand the progressive sclerosis, inefficiency, and corruption that largely characterized public authorities and the military apparatus during the war years and which, not surprisingly, were often greater in anti-fascist or only superficially fascist circles and less so in more strictly fascist circles, which—despite many *serious* failings—were, all things considered, especially the more political ones, more motivated.

A typical example of this is what happened, from the very beginning, in military circles, especially in the Army. For most of them, the war was experienced in a climate that seems almost unreal today, in which it was not uncommon for what mattered most to be not so much the outcome of military operations as one's own career, not taking on too much personal responsibility, strictly adhering to canonized principles, even if they were now outdated or had proven harmful, and often in a restrictive and jealous manner of their own prerogatives, even when this was to the detriment of better conduct of operations: if not outright criticism of their 'competitors', trying in all cases to shift the responsibility for what was wrong onto others and onto the regime and Mussolini in particular, even when it was largely or exclusively the fault of the military themselves. Not to mention their jealousy towards the Germans which was often accompanied by a frustrating sense of inferiority.

psychological and a lack of dignity and firmness towards them, when it would have been necessary to try to assert one's arguments and curb their confidence and arrogance. And the picture becomes even more serious if we shift our attention from the military to the civil and administrative spheres of public power, where it is even more evident (although, we repeat, there were exceptions that cannot be ignored, but it must also be said that, unlike in the years before the war, more than the old Giolittian bureaucracy, the more properly fascist one) was the ambiguous accentuation of behaviors that in the years of the triumphant regime had often tended to ensure the smooth functioning of the service and sometimes to interpret more radical fascist norms and initiatives in a moderate key for this purpose, whereas now they took on the meaning of a cautious establishment (or re-establishment) of contacts with the moderate sectors of the old anti-fascist political world and a multiplication of those with the economic world for the purpose of its own reconversion.

It is certainly not our intention to reproach the Italian bourgeoisie for not having felt the war in any substantial way and for not having supported it with the same enthusiasm as in 1915-18. While taking full account of the very different moods with which the two conflicts were experienced and the direct and indirect responsibilities of fascism, in order to truly understand the attitude of the bourgeoisie, it is first necessary to clarify that - beyond the mere distinction between the middle classes and other social classes - in order to correctly identify the contemporary Italian bourgeoisie, we must not refer, as Croce rightly pointed out, to legal, economic, social, and sociological motivations that were valid for other eras, but to ethical and political motivations. Only from this perspective does the 'bourgeoisie' appear as it really is: a complex of very diverse realities, which for the purposes of our discussion can be reduced to two. One is social, very numerous and whose multiple stratifications made it something very composite, but, in essence, 'mediocre in feeling, in customs, in thinking', which, after initial enthusiasm, experienced the war passively in all respects, without real ideals and concerned only with everyday life.

glcsi failed to break through, thus proving that it was not due to unpreparedness and incompetence that our lines had collapsed the last time.

At the same time, while our units, organized and commanded by the Germans, are fighting magnificently, demonstrating an extraordinary spirit of emulation, the others, who constantly have before their eyes the spectacle and example of our General Staff, are listless and demoralized, having no confidence in the officers who lead them.

The "Super Command" thus represents, in practical terms, a hotbed of defeatism, and a single episode is enough to

No; another, ethical-political, much more restricted, which, to quote Croce again, constituted "the complex of all those who have a keen sense of the public good, suffer passionately for it, refine and determine their concepts for this purpose, and act accordingly." - where 'in accordance' is to be understood not only in a subjective sense, but also in reference to *the ethical mediation* exercised by it - for which, whether fascist, anti-fascist or anti-fascist, the war was a true moral drama experienced in constant tension and which was the soul of both fascism and anti-fascism.

As Rosario Romeo has repeatedly pointed out, World War II revealed the fundamental weakness of Italy's ethical and political fabric, particularly the strength of the psychological and cultural roots that still tied Italians to their pre-unification past. And, as regards more specifically the majority of the bourgeoisie *in the broad sense*, the lack of a sense of community solidarity and the inability to put the general interests of the national community before their own feelings and particular interests. Hence its inability to assume the duties that, more than any other component of society, it should have assumed (and which other bourgeoisies, from the English to the German, were able to assume, becoming the center of cohesion of their respective countries), its failure to take sides, even on opposing sides, and its retreat into a position of passive waiting, from which the first to emerge would have been - when there was no longer any doubt that a prolongation

of the war would have meant not only unnecessarily aggravating the Italian tragedy, but also risking being swept away along with fascism—the economically strongest groups, the industrial and financial world, and large agricultural landowners.

In this context and from this perspective, we can understand Mussolini's (and part of fascism's) anger and recurring outbursts against the bourgeoisie and the "bourgeois mentality" and his promise of a "third wave" that would "put things right" not only for the capitalists, but also for the bourgeoisie as a whole. For him, as for Croce, but in a completely different way, the bourgeoisie was not so much a social class as the product of a secular culture, a mentality, a way of life, and the bourgeoisie were skeptics, creatures of habit, whose habits had been "disrupted" by the war. And we can also understand his postponing the 'reckoning' until after the end of the conflict. Although the 'historical inadequacy', 'passivity' and 'cowardice' of the bourgeoisie outraged him and drove him to fury, he was aware that, if confronted head-on, it could shake itself out of its torpor, emerge from its passivity and take an active stand against the regime, with all the consequences that this would have on other social classes and groups. And, to return to the starting point, we can also understand why, ultimately, the leaders of the regime's police apparatus were not overly concerned about the overall attitude of the bourgeoisie (which, moreover, ended up acting as a brake and breaking any possible solidarity between the different social classes in an anti-fascist sense) and instead focused their attention mainly on certain sectors of the bourgeois world, intellectuals and young people, whose attitude appeared to them, not without reason, to be the only truly dangerous one at that moment because it was potentially capable of exercising that national function that the bourgeoisie as a whole had not even felt tempted to exercise. In practice, these were the same sectors to which Croce almost completely restricted the ability to conceive of reality in ethical-political terms and to behave accordingly. We say 'in practice' because the two sectors, although largely coinciding, were not completely identical and had their own particular characteristics, especially of a generational nature.

Numerous studies have directly or indirectly addressed the issue of culture and intellectuals during the

fascism, emphasizing this or that aspect of it and dealing with this or that group of intellectuals, this or that cultural institution, publishing house, magazine, the connection between fascist culture and pre- and post-fascist culture, its modernity or lack thereof, its isolation or lack thereof with respect to that of other countries, etc.; not to mention those dedicated to individual intellectuals and politicians involved in the political management of culture at various levels. Over the course of two decades, our knowledge on the subject has grown considerably, become more precise, and sometimes even changed. In some cases, this has led to a reversal of judgments, sometimes justified and necessary, sometimes much less so, especially where it has been largely influenced by a sort of exhibitionist coquetry on the part of a number of intellectuals—yesterday more or less *à la page*, today on the wane.

- who, at the time of the fall of fascism, had minimized or pre-presented in a very particular light (the "Nicodemism," the "honest dissimulation" they had to resort to in order to escape the rigors of fascism and be able to continue working and studying) their adherence to it, if they had not even taken on the role of long-standing anti-fascists, while in recent years - with the political and cultural climate having changed - they have wanted to prove their open-mindedness by recovering - to the point of almost boasting about it - their youthful fascist militancy, which they, however, almost always present in terms that are too hasty and conditioned by hindsight; that is, where, almost as a reaction, the thesis of intellectual conformism has been taken to such extremes that it has become a thin crust that crumbles at the first sign of winds contrary to the Axis; a conformism that was certainly a reality, but which, not infrequently, responded to a logic, to motivations that must be understood and taken into account and which, in any case, in many cases entered into crisis later than one would have us believe, sometimes even only on July 25. Leaving aside other more debatable indicators, it is enough to make a list of how many intellectuals

- and not all of them third-rate - were there that day with their suitcases in hand ready to leave for Germany to give lectures or lessons or participate in conferences.

Despite this wealth of studies, it cannot be said that the problem of culture and intellectuals has found, even in broad terms, a historically ^{satisfactory} solution.¹ Much less can it be said that it has found one with regard to the period of World War II, on which there are no specific studies and the few references to it (almost all limited to the case of Primato, but seen outside of any

actual reference to the rest of the culture of those years and even more so to the general political events that in many cases constitute the true key to understanding it) are completely insufficient and often misleading.

In the absence of reference studies and given the impossibility of addressing this issue here with the breadth that it would require, even in general terms, it would entail, it is still possible to outline the attitude of intellectuals during the war and try to understand both the value that fascism, and Mussolini in particular, attributed to it, and which sectors of the intellectual world were of concern to the regime (and why), starting from some contemporary positions taken within the regime itself.

It was already clear even before Hitler launched his troops against Poland that the intellectuals' consent was tinged with concern and criticism and was often only superficial; racial legislation and the

The "Pact of Steel" had in fact been a wake-up call for many, leaving little doubt about the dangers looming over Italy. There were also those who had more or less explicitly denounced it. Among these, Prezolini was perhaps the most lucid. The founder of *La Voce* had been living in the United States for years and only very rarely wrote for the Italian press. On February 8, 1939, the *Gazzetta del Popolo* published an article by him entitled *Il fascismo e gli intellettuali* (Fascism and Intellectuals) which is a document of great interest, both for understanding Prezolini's position towards fascism and because it shows how well he knew his Italian colleagues and, while trying as far as possible - publishable in an Italian newspaper - to push them to take responsibility and thus take a *positive* stance, he foresaw what their attitude would ultimately be. Starting from the question that many Americans were asking themselves in those months, namely whether fascism had always distrusted and remained suspicious of intellectuals, the article outlined a profile of the Italian intellectual and his "intellectual malady," which led him to argue about everything and not take risks or responsibility and, ultimately, not act, and concluded by answering the initial question: "I don't know if fascism distrusts intellectuals; what I do know is that it would do very well to distrust them." This conclusion might appear to be in line with what those fascists who accused Italian intellectuals of disengagement and lukewarmness were saying. However, the true meaning of the article, its key to understanding, lies in the image that immediately preceded the conclusion: when a ship is caught in a storm (and the world, Prezolini declared

Explicitly, it was at that moment a ship amid raging waves) it is necessary not to speculate, but to work to avoid shipwreck; it was clear that Prezzolini criticized the disengagement of intellectuals; However, if one knows how to read, it is also clear that his criticism went in the opposite direction to that of the fascists and that his exhortation to intellectuals was to express their dissent and not to take refuge in a more or less aristocratic disengagement.

Nevertheless, when Italy entered the war, very few within the fascist leadership had considered the issue of intellectuals. The belief that the conflict would be short-lived made it seem secondary to most; not to mention those who—as Sergio Panunzio had already done in 1936 during the war in Ethiopia—thought that it would lead them to *take* real problems more *seriously* and pay more attention to them, thus moderating their traditional tendency to philosophize, philosophize, quibble, make distinctions and comparisons on every subject, or shut themselves up in their ivory towers of a culture disconnected from reality. Nor did things change substantially when it became clear that the war would not be short and that all energies had to be mobilized for it. Despite the periodic alarms raised by various figures such as Farinacci and Preziosi and—on a completely different side and with a different logic—the drastically negative and dismissive judgments of a Spirit, which in its "estraneità alla vita" (estrangement from life), in its "intrinseca fiacchezza spirituale" (intrinsic spiritual weakness), in its

"capitulation of culture, especially official culture" and in his silence, Lenzio found validation for his condemnation of the bourgeoisie and, therefore, of the need for fascism to oust its ^{culture}. In fact, little or nothing was undertaken in this field by the regime. So much so that when, towards the end of 1942, Concetto Pettinato (then correspondent for La Stampa in Switzerland) privately published (having apparently been unable to find a publisher willing to print it) his pamphlet *Gli intellettuali e la guerra* (Intellectuals and the War) it caused great embarrassment within the regime: even though it was only a sort of tirade against 'the silence of intellectuals' and a denunciation of their nineteenth-century mentality, 'isolationist, domestic, egocentric and agoraphobic', of the 'spiritual poverty' that prevented them from believing

in the righteousness of the Axis cause, and of the responsibilities they had assumed by not taking a clear position in its favor ("war is waged with weapons and ammunition even before blood: but ammunition does not consist only of bombs and bullets, it also consists of ideas and acts of faith"), thus leaving the field open to enemy propaganda "which has done and has been doing the impossible for two years to dishonor Italians and Italy" and to crush their morale.

It cannot be ruled out that, despite the embarrassment and criticism it provoked, Pettinato's indictment, together with the deterioration of the military situation in Africa, contributed to the emergence in the early months of the following year of a number of initiatives which, as we shall see in the next chapter, were taken by groups and individual fascist intellectuals in support of the home front. What we are interested in clarifying here, however, is that Pettinato's vehement indictment, while hitting the mark on the one hand, on the other completely ignored what should have been the other accused, in the absence of which the whole argument lost its value. If the intellectuals had remained silent, what had fascism and the regime done on their part to prevent this and, above all, to convince them of the goodness of the cause for which Italy had gone to war? But in this case, the first indictment should have been followed by a second, no less violent, because in three years of war, both fascism and the regime did very little, indeed almost nothing, in this regard, and almost always badly.

The first to feel no need for a *policy of intellectuals*, whom he considered either incurable "inventors of abstract problems" or incapable of understanding reality politically and behaving accordingly, so that they did damage even when motivated by the best of intentions, was ^{Mussolini}. In 1914-15, he had looked upon them as an elite...

fundamental aspect of his political action and - despite the fact that the experience of war had greatly cooled his enthusiasm for them, to the point of convincing him that of all social groups they were the ones who had coped least well with the war, experiencing it essentially as an uninterrupted flood of rhetoric and rhetoric - once he came to power, he still deluded himself into thinking that he could find effective support among the best of them, not only in words, but in commitment and concrete collaboration. Having lost this hope too, he became convinced that, rather than intellectuals, they were bourgeois, incapable of looking beyond their own interests and petty quarrels, of looking at things—as he thought he did—fifty years ahead, and that, therefore, [^]and *will* (that faith and will which, as has been said, he was convinced made everything possible) were not their cup of tea, for several years now the problem of intellectuals had ceased to exist for him. Absorbed in that of 'moral reform' and

But Mussolini, when he read the article in draft form, refused to accept it, partly so as not to *endorse* the scandal (*theoretical*, but very real, that Soffici denounced), and partly, we believe, so as not to encourage a resurgence of conflict between the various factions within the party. Nor can we rule out the possibility that he felt personally hurt by what Soffici had written, since, however one read it, the article revealed in various places, and in particular in its conclusion, a strong *polemic* against him: "The triumph of a revolution consists in making the people, the race that carries it out, take a step forward on their path and raise them one degree in the plane of civilization. But for the triumph to be complete, that is, to represent the affirmation of an idea that is not local or contingent, but absolute and universal, every revolution naturally tends to extend beyond the limits of a people or a race, to spread, in essence, throughout the whole of humanity. This is why every truly great and far-reaching revolution necessarily encounters resistance from other peoples and races that are not yet ready to accept its postulates, and which therefore oppose it and do everything they can to prevent its development. It follows that such revolutions inevitably prepare the way for war and always end up leading to war.

Now, war represents precisely the testing, or let us say the examination, of the people, of the race that has been shaped by the revolution. The formidable ordeal of war is where we see whether a new spirit has truly penetrated and electrified the revolutionary multitudes, whether civic, intellectual, social, scientific, and military virtues have reached the level necessary to establish, with the organized excellence of their complex and with the force of arms, courage, resistance to sacrifice, and a dedicated dedication of the individual, the new order that the revolution aimed at.

Only if all this happens, that is, if the secular vision of the Cape, supported by what could be called his mystical fury, his iron will, and his sublimated moral sense, is transfused into the entire body of the nation, exalting its energy and faith in the goodness of its cause, can we be certain of victory, not meaning by victory a partial and temporary success, but the change of a world and the inauguration of a new era.

And here we see once again the tremendous responsibility that the leader of a revolution takes on from the outset, and which accompanies him from beginning to end. In fact, an initial mistake in the choice of the first collaborators would be enough to undermine the conditions essential for victory, that is, for the crowning achievement and fulfillment of the mission of the revolution. By choosing the wrong people at the outset, they would naturally choose second collaborators similar to themselves, who in turn would do the same; so that instead of a revolutionary ruling class, we would end up with a kind of association of evil-doers, not only incapable of moralizing, fortifying, and heroizing a people or a race, but, as if on purpose, on the contrary, polluting, scandalizing, brutalizing, and debasing from top to bottom the entire nation entrusted to its government.

That is why the great Leader takes great care in choosing his closest collaborators, in verifying their value, integrity, and faith, to select them without pause, to communicate to them, as to disciples, and perhaps successors and continuators, as much as he can of his own magnanimity, purity, and genius, so that they may be effective translators into living reality, and not traitors, of his idea of a new order in the world. The article was therefore returned to Ravasio with a curt "no" in his own handwriting (see ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Car-eggio ris. (1922-1943)*, b. 14, fasc. 208/R, "Soffici Ardengo," sottofasc. 2).

"new civilization," it would naturally have run its course and been resolved with the generational change—both natural and consequent to the end of the war—when the old bourgeois intellectuals would have been replaced by the new fascist intellectuals, the result of fascist "moral reform" and the war. For the moment, what mattered most was to limit as much as possible the damage they could do, which, moreover, he thought could not be serious, both because they had few ties to the real country and because they were people who wanted above all to live their lives in peace and could be easily controlled with a little stick and even more carrot.

On April 25, 1942, speaking to the federal secretaries of Lombardy gathered for a meeting at Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini expressed himself in terms that clearly convey the essence of his ^{attitude}:

Finally, I would like to say that we should not worry too much about intellectuals. All these intellectuals, after all, have no connection with the lives lived by Italians. What do you want Italians, twenty-five million good farmers, to be interested in, arcadianism or hermeticism, or whatever you want to call it, or other more or less fanciful musings of people who have to think because they can do nothing else, since they cannot act? So these brains spin continuously, often in a vacuum, like car engines when they are idling.

Now, these people are consuming the phosphorus they have in their brains, and since they have so little, I believe their reserves are running low. These professors, these elements, are always on the opposite side from us, and I declare that I am happy about that. They would be a ballast that would weigh down our machine. This does not mean that we reject all cultural issues. But we want our own culture, and in this regard I have said that we already have a fairly developed body of doctrine, defined in its essential elements, and that after twenty years of rule it has already laid the foundations of its doctrine, not only in ideas but in practice. We have been innovators, pioneers; we have brought to the attention of contemporary consciousness problems that few had glimpsed. We have truly been the subversives of a century, without denying it. But we have taken only the vital elements and rejected those we consider exhausted.

The only sector of the intellectual world whose activity and collaboration Mussolini considered theoretically important and unaffected by intellectualism, and whose collaboration he deemed necessary to secure (even if often

his lack of preparation and scientific sensitivity, a certain distrust of abstract concepts, and a lack of confidence in the practical application of certain research projects ultimately led him to prioritize other requests in financial terms) was the ^{technical-scientific one}.

"This war," he stated bluntly, still speaking to the federal secretaries of ^{Lombardy}, "is the war of engineers, who day after day rack their brains to discover more powerful engines, airplanes, weapons, armor, longer-range cannons, faster ships..." As we have already mentioned, the scholars studying the problems of the New Order were a case apart, but he saw them essentially from a political and probably contingent perspective, namely the need to have a *staff* of specialists who could develop a doctrine for the future European and world order which, on the one hand, could serve to protect Italy's political and economic interests and, on the other, could be accepted by those peoples who, fearing absolute German hegemony, were looking for ways to curb it. and economic interests of Italy and, on the other, could be accepted by those peoples who, fearing absolute German hegemony, were looking for ways to curb it. Significant in this regard is his interest in and encouragement of studies on the 'zone economy' and, conversely, his discouragement of those on 'new finance'.

Considering intellectuals to be a category destined to be radically transformed after the war and, for the time being, essentially harmless and, in some sectors, useful for their technical skills, Mussolini's real problem was that of a "deep-rooted effort" aimed at "politically educating" the masses and, thanks also to the war, making them the substance of the "new civilization." Of a

"new civilization" in which the various social components, and above all those that for him truly embodied the possibilities and potential of the Italian race, namely farmers and workers, would have to

homogenize themselves as much as possible, not only socially (he was convinced that "in economic terms" the "drive of the proletariat to become bourgeoisie" was "irresistible"¹), but also by exchanging, so to speak, their best qualities and freeing themselves from their deteriorating particularisms and the conditioning of bourgeois culture and mentality.

In this perspective, he was even willing to revise some of the key ideas he had sworn by for years. Significant in this regard is a note by Camillo Pellizzi summarizing some of the most important points of the conversation the president of the INCF had with him on June 19, 1941. *In fact*, it reads:

He is very fond of "urban planning"; he has his own idea of what it should aim for, which he sums up in what he calls this "apparent paradox": "making farmers citizens, and citizens farmers"; that is, bringing many of the advantages of the city to the countryside, and then extending the cities so that every worker also has land to cultivate around his home. He dwells on this vision, this trend, highlighting its beauty. On "industrial decentralization," he says that the Po Valley is already "crammed" and that industry must gradually be pushed southward, also for strategic reasons.

On closer inspection, from this same perspective, even the "problem of young people" lost much of the importance it had had in the past.

There is no doubt that young people remained a fundamental point of reference for Mussolini. Not only did they represent "our ideal and physical continuity" and had to "be better than us," because it was to them that "command" would pass in the near future ("for this reason," he said to Ravasio³ at the end of December 1941, "I chose a young party secretary; Vidussoni is twenty-six years old"), but, overall, they were passing the "war maturity test" well, so that, on the one hand, it was necessary to be careful to avoid generational rifts⁴ while on the other

It had to be clear that if he found himself needing to choose "comrades in arms," he would choose them "from among the young people, perhaps with all the mistakes and excesses that we ourselves had." Those who (in the army, but also in the party) took offense and were too irritated by the "indifference" of young people were wrong. "Not caring" had been the "banner" of the squadristi "in the magnificent days of combat" a n d constituted "a moral fact that must be nurtured in the youth to come," so that, if any excesses had to be limited by appropriate "education," there was no need to exaggerate.

They are young and they are excellent soldiers; they are the men of tomorrow. It would be enough to redeem them with the battalions of young fascists who fought at Bir el Go-bi with a heroism that astonished the British. Two battalions were surrounded for three days, isolated, attacked by hundreds of tanks, suffered fifty percent casualties, a n d remained in place without retreating a ^{single} meter

On certain occasions, and in particular on January 24, 1942, speaking to the national leadership of ^{the PNF}, Mussolini even went so far as to say that one should not be too harsh even with those young people who exaggerated in an anti-fascist sense: o f t e n their behavior was attributable more to their families than to themselves, to those families "that were once called respectable families," to the influence of some anti-fascist priest, to their naivety in the face of the maneuvers of some Jews, or rather they were "foolish" people who had made

"of readings that they had not been able to properly assimilate" (and here the blow was almost certainly aimed a t certain intellectuals a n d fascist leaders and their left-wing corporatism) or had "some intolerance of an academic nature, of exams, of concessions," so that, rather than making them martyrs by referring them to the Special Court, it was sufficient to send them into exile.

However, it would be wrong to stop at these statements and judgments; to truly understand Mussolini's position, we need to dig deeper and pay attention to the places and moments when they were made.

fair repression, nor effective propaganda, nor the elimination of the evils and defects that are being complained about. Vidussoni and his collaborators are not capable of doing this: they lack knowledge of people, situations, and problems. When there is a storm, only a sturdy boat and experienced men can stay afloat. Vidussoni is a good guy, but he is just a guy. The Party Secretary at this moment should at least be an animator, while you know that when he speaks, he creates the opposite effect' (ACS, *Duce's private secretary, Correspondence (1922-1943)*, b . 4 4 , phase 247/R,

not pronounced. On the rare public occasions when he referred to young people and their attitude towards the war – typically in his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on June 1, 1941, on the first anniversary of ^{Italy's} entry into ^{the} war – his judgment was obviously positive, more so than what he really felt in his heart. More complex and articulated, and often tinged with a more or less explicit polemic towards those (Bottai and Farinacci in particular) who criticized his attitude and wanted to raise the "problem of young people," was the opinion expressed within the party. And even more explicit and substantiated with considerations relating more to the future than to the present was the one he gave *tête-à-tête* with those few – such as De Begnac – with whom he sometimes engaged in conversations that most often took the form of monologues.

As we have said many times, it is a myth (which many people had an interest in promoting for a variety of reasons, especially in the immediate post-war period, but also during the Fascist era, and which is still repeated today by journalists who are more interested in reiterating a political judgment than in understanding and explaining that historical period) that Mussolini was not well informed about the reality of Italy. Nor, of course, can we think that he was not well informed about young people: his interest in them, a series of testimonies that are anything but unreliable, and a wealth of archival documentation prove otherwise. And it is on the basis of this fact that we can evaluate his statements and judgments.

On April 25, 1942, speaking to the federal secretaries of Lombardy, he did not go beyond a very vague reference in his speech to the "hard, gray, mechanical" character that the war had taken on: "I believe that twenty-year-olds did not look with satisfaction at the character of this war; literature has played some nasty tricks on us; as usual, people thought it would be a Garibaldi-style war..." Less than a month later, on May 18, at the national directorate of the PNF, before stating, as has been said, that, if he had to choose "comrades in arms," he would choose them from among the young people, he made two very brief references to the issue they represented: one to the need not to neglect certain "symptoms of spiritual unease" that were perceptible among them; the other to the "true young people," "worthy of carrying our flags," that is: the young fascists of Bir el Gobi: thus making it clear that he did not consider those who were not animated by the same spirit and tenacity *to be true* young people and true fascists. Two very vague references, but ones that take on meaning if one has pre-

On the one hand, he reiterated what he had said on January 24 to the federal secretaries of Lazio, Campania, Abruzzo and Molise, and Puglia, who had gathered at Palazzo Venezia for a briefing. On the other hand, he reiterated the *leitmotif* of all his speeches, both party and private, on young people during this period.

Taking the floor immediately after the federal secretary of Rome, Mario Colesanti, Mussolini showed that he was well aware that things were not going well among young people, especially those of bourgeois origin, and that the 'spiritual unease' he would refer to four months later was deeper than some cases of *political recklessness* might suggest.

There are, ^{he said}, fourteen or fifteen thousand students at the University of Rome: too many. Their numbers have increased; there has been an inflation of students in recent times. An unpleasant phenomenon, it must be acknowledged. There are universities that have doubled their enrollment: all people who had forgotten they had a high school diploma or who had taken other paths and now thought that by enrolling in university at the last minute they could delay military service. Therefore, the university population has risen from eighty-five thousand to one hundred and thirty to one hundred and forty thousand students.

And two weeks later, he raised no objection to the federal representative of Lucca, Mario Piazzesi, who had compared "the youth of the fields and workshops" with the "studious" youth, to the advantage of the former, "excellent from every point of view," and *explained the indifference* of the latter with the fact that it was

"too spoiled and loaded with money" and had had "too easy a ^{life}." ² Add to this the fact that for months, practically since the weeks leading up to the entry into the war, Mussolini had been receiving regular reports *on the indifference and discontent* spreading among students, especially at the major universities, particularly in Rome, but also among high school students, which generally manifested itself in the form of demands (sometimes tumultuous) to be allowed to pass their exams.

"with eighteen guaranteed," refusing to sign the voluntary enlistment applications circulated by the Guf and protesting the suspension of provisions that had previously allowed university students to defer military service until the ^{age of} twenty-six, and that all those

These reports were essentially unanimous in denouncing a malaise that was not limited to the "dead souls" and "daddy's boys" politically indifferent bourgeoisie, but also present among young fascists, with the dual consequence of arousing divisions and conflicts within the Guf¹ and provoking a radicalization of the more strictly fascist part of them and the emergence of criticism inspired by the behavior of the "dead souls" to extend, on the one hand, to the bourgeoisie *tout court*, going so far as to accuse it of moral and material sabotage of the war and calling for drastic measures and "examples" against it, and, on the other hand, to the regime, to many of its most authoritative and prominent exponents (accused of inefficiency, bureaucracy, careerism, corruption, and little or no revolutionary and fascist spirit) and even the party sometimes in such explicit terms as to provoke warnings, internment, seizures and confiscations against them and the various newspapers and magazines that acted as their mouthpieces the fact that, despite all this, Mussolini, who in the past had identified the issue of young people as one of the central problems of fascism and its future, now showed a tendency to downplay its importance and even almost deny it, cannot be explained either

months of 1941 and led, especially in Rome and Naples, to various incidents and arrests by the police. In some cases, such as in Treviso, these incidents highlighted a confused state of mind among young people, who harbored a strong distrust of the military hierarchy. A report dated March 5, 1941, states that in this town, several young people claimed, "If they order us to shout 'Long live the Duce and long live the war,' that's fine, we're willing to do it, but ordering us to go and get ourselves killed under the command of stupid generals is another matter! However, we are also capable of shouting: down with the Duce and down with the war" (see ACS, *Min. Interno, Dir. gen. P.S., Div. polizia politica, cat. Q8 (1926-1945)*, p. 218).

¹ In May 1941, the national secretariat of the Guf took a series of measures against university students enrolled in the Guf who had made themselves most visible, including through acts of vandalism, in demanding to pass exams without taking them. Twenty Guf members were expelled in Rome, 17 in Naples, 12 in Salerno, 12 in Lucca, Avolino, and Potenza, 5 in Cosenza, 4 in Benevento, Foggia, Taranto, and Catanzaro, 3 in Ragusa, 2 in Bari, Reggio Calabria, and Messina, 1; and two others whose section is unknown (see "Libro e moschetto," May 20, 1941).

² Statements to this effect appeared not only in the local Guf publications, but also in the national publication, *Libro e moschetto* (which changed its title during the war, crossing out the word "Book and" adding the words "in arms" to the subtitle *Giornale dei Gruppi Fascisti Universitari* (Journal of University Fascist Groups). See, for example, S. GRENA, *Bisogna fucilare qualche borghese (Some Bourgeois Must Be Shot)* (May 1, 1941) and, above all, 1. BUSETTI, *La "borghesia" e la guerra* (The "Bourgeoisie" and the War) (November 1, 1941), in which we read: "Many 'proletarians' have died, many will die. More than one of them should not have died; they owe their death to the moral and material sabotage that originates in the narrow-minded selfishness of many, too many Italian 'bourgeois'."

³ One of the points on which the youth press insisted most was the need for a vast purge of the PNF. In "Libro e moschetto" (June 13, 1942), S. HICHERA (*Il partito dopo la vittoria*) went so far as to advocate a genuine reformation of the party into a new organization (the National Fascist Order or Imperial Fascist Order) with a top-down structure. At its base would be the Gii; at its center, an Italian Front of the Littorio, which would replace the PNF and would have the task of organizing "the masses" and taking care of their education, and to which membership would always be open; finally, at the top would be the highly elitist Italian Combat Groups, which could only be accessed from the Front after a "very rigorous screening."

⁴ On April 1, 1942, G. BOTTAI, in his *diary*, p. 301, noted: "You can feel the unease growing, in people's hearts... Young people, here and there, are being arrested and sent into exile. And they are 'our' young people, who have come out of the avant-garde, the Guf, the political training centers; no longer the remnants of the old liberal bourgeoisie."

with a conscious inability to deal with it, which he would try to mask by downplaying and even denying the problem, nor with his loss of contact with reality.

At the bottom of it all, there was probably a certain degree of impotence; However, resolving the issue with this explanation would be an oversimplification and, at least as far as understanding Mussolini's personality is concerned, misleading. Not to mention that, by reducing everything to this, we lose the opportunity to grasp both *the* polemical *spirit* that underlay certain of his statements and, above all, the link between his way of conceiving the problem of young people and that of intellectuals.

Despite everything, Mussolini was and remained, in his own way, a realist and established, or at least attempted to establish, a scale of priorities within which the domestic front, when the prospect of a short war faded, assumed an importance that initially no one had paid the attention it deserved. As he said on April 18, 1942: speaking to the editors of the newspapers affiliated with the Press Agency: since one could not "expect forty-six million Italians to be idealists," the crux of the domestic front was now the problem of food. As for the war, it would be won by the "generous," by those who proved to be more "idealistic" and more capable, on the whole, of doing their duty. From this point of view, young people, on the whole, were behaving well and cases of "disengagement" were, he specified a week later to the federal secretaries of Lombardy: "very limited and, on the whole, irrelevant." He continued to repeat this opinion until the end, because even on March 11, 1943, at the national headquarters of the PNF, he called for "very" close supervision of young people, given that certain tendencies and phenomena were emerging among them (such as a "kind of disinterest in history and world affairs" and a sort of *monkey-see, monkey-do* imitation of American and British fashions) "that must attract our attention," but he also stated that "the vast majority of young people" were "fine"

Towards the end of 1941 in particular, Mussolini began to derive from this positive assessment of a essentially political nature, he began to argue that in reality there was no real problem with young people, even at a theoretical level. "Youth... is a transitional state, not a definitive one."

If it were definitive, there would be a youth problem, but it is not a definitive state. A man of thirty is no longer young, unlike a man of twenty. It seems rather trivial, but that is how it is⁴.

This problem of young people is a problem that has some curious aspects. First of all, it would be necessary to know when one is young and how long one remains young. That is the point. If youth were a permanent state... the problem of young people could truly be addressed. But every young person ages one day at a time. When talking about young people, we must take into account their age. However, this is not enough. There are young people who, at twenty, twenty-five, thirty years of age already show signs of decline

To understand why Mussolini, after having given it so much importance in the past, now denied the very existence of a youth problem, it is necessary to refer to his position on the *politics of intellectuals*.

Especially in his conversations with De ^{Begnac}, Mussolini made several statements during this period that reveal how, by denying the existence of a youth problem, he wanted above all to deny the need for a *youth policy*, which had been advocated for years by Bottai and, more recently, by Serena, whom he considered at that time to be useless and, probably, even harmful. The young people who had gone to fight "carrying the heritage of the culture of their revolution," he told him, had understood - unlike those "overworked literati" who had "stayed at home intent on asking the three-legged table if we will win"—that 'it is up to the conflict to resolve the problems that existed and those that exist and to pave the way for the temperament of those to come': the war.

It will change everything, resolve many existential contradictions, and empower those who did not want to take on any responsibility in public life, those who were foolishly excluded from all responsibility.

As for the others, such as intellectuals, "to whom too much trust was given and too much freedom was lavished by us" and whose consent "the culture of revolution" could very well do without, there was no need to worry, because once the war was over, "the useless... will be removed from the scene and the rational will take their place and the revolution will be accomplished." Those who were not aware of this were not "true" fascists, so even conversation and discussion became useless, because ultimately - as he said to both the directors

editors of the Press Agency's daily newspapers and the board of directors¹ - "today there are no more doctrines to discover" and "there is nothing that can be added to our fundamental principles."

We have established our principles in a precise manner: the Charter of Labor, the Charter of Education. We have provided answers to all the problems that the conscience of the people has set before us at this moment. There will be things to refine, to update, if you will: that is what we do continuously, through legislation. But the foundations have been laid, and our experience and that of others has tested them.

Going back on these principles was unthinkable, absurd; discussing them with those who did not understand their value and historical necessity was therefore pointless. Like intellectuals, young people, for the time being, had to be kept under surveillance, without turning them into martyrs. Understanding and, as far as possible, tolerance, accompanied, however, by action aimed at directing them "to study what we have done over the last twenty years, so that they do not feel they are remaking the world, but only perfecting what has already been done," should instead be reserved for 'true young people', especially those who came from the 'virgin and fresh forces' of the country, not yet 'gnawed by the worm of bourgeois criticism'.

Having clarified Mussolini's position with regard to intellectuals and young people, before returning to discuss the evolution of the attitude of these two social groups towards fascism and war, and the reasons that at a certain point led the regime's repressive apparatus to consider them the most dangerous, it is worth pausing for a moment to examine some facts and issues that are also worth clarifying.

The first of these issues concerns Bottai and the significance to be attributed to his famous magazine *Primato*. According to various scholars, while the vast majority of the Fascist leadership did not understand the importance of the problem of intellectuals (and that of young people, which in many respects was one and the same), Bottai was among the few who did address it, and with greater clarity and timeliness than anyone else, giving rise, among other things, to *Primato*, which he conceived as a meeting place and forum for discussion even for those who kept their distance from the regime and the war. In support of this, the main argument put forward was the 'courage of harmony', as claimed by Bottai himself in the editorial of the first issue of *Primato* (March 1, 1940) to rally 'the living forces of Italian culture' and attempt, 'through a

orderly, harmonious, and, as far as possible, nobly "popular," "to make the relationship between art and politics, between art and life, concrete and effective" and to "bring about unity," "in the name and interest of the homeland," between "all the various forms of culture," and the "interventionism of culture" required on the eve of Italy's entry into the war by Bottai himself, not in the name of

"submitting to events in a disciplined manner," but rather "participating in them, penetrating them, understanding them in order to dominate them" at the heart of the problems, so that

"the new civilization" would flow into all areas of human activity and become science, education, and ^{schooling}; an appeal he reiterated in the aftermath of June ¹, urging intellectuals to

to intervene, to enter, to march, to move, not out of a brutal instinct for struggle, but out of a lofty, enlightened imperative of conscience: to bring order where disorder reigns, law where arbitrariness prevails, civilization where injustice is perpetrated.

The fact that Primato accepted and even sought the collaboration of intellectuals who were not only isolated but also suspected of anti-fascism, or, above all, who revealed themselves to be so at the time of the regime's fall, was considered further confirmation of the importance that Bottai had attributed to the issue of intellectuals since the beginning of the war and, therefore, to the need to bind them to the regime by meeting certain of their demands and allowing them greater freedom of discussion than other fascist leaders who were less politically sensitive to the issue (such as Pavolini, who, at the time of entering the war, would have liked to suppress "La critica" by resorting to the expedient of applying the provisions relating to the reduction of paper consumption during wartime³), were not willing to do.

Despite its many influential supporters, this image of Bottai and Primato is, in our opinion, to be rejected. First of all, because, with a few insignificant exceptions, the intellectuals' distancing themselves from "Italy at war" and the regime and their transition to anti-fascism (including many of those who collaborated with Primato) were late—later than many of them would later have us believe—and were determined in most cases by the experience of war.

and in particular by the deterioration of the military situation at the end of 1942, and not by Italy's participation in the conflict, which certainly aroused among them, and especially among the older ones who had not been morally and culturally formed in the fascist climate, reservations and concerns that were not insignificant, as well as opposition and intimate dramas of conscience, but - we must have the courage to acknowledge - was initially accepted or endured out of conviction, patriotic sentiment and discipline out of conformity, because it was considered short-lived and easy by the vast majority of them, so much so that - to give just two examples of highly respected non-fascist intellectuals - Calamandrei did not interrupt his collaboration on the drafting of the code of civil procedure¹ and the physicists of Fermi's Roman school only decided in the autumn of 1942 to 'mute' their research into nuclear physics and devote themselves instead to cosmic rays so as not to run the risk of being involved by the Germans in the preparation of the atomic bomb on which they were working. And, again, because many of the transitions to anti-fascism (we are not referring, of course, to those that were purely opportunistic) among younger intellectuals and many Gufini occurred with a naturalness that denotes a remarkable underlying cultural and psychological affinity and continuity between their earlier fascism

and with an eye to the dangers threatening the foundations of every individual life, he persuaded them that there was no possibility of salvation in neutrality and isolation... Without the war, I would have remained an intellectual with mainly literary interests: I would have discussed political issues, but above all I would have sought in human history only the reasons for a deep interest, and meeting a girl or any impulse of the imagination would have mattered more to me than any party or doctrine. Other friends, more inclined to immediately grasp political realities, had devoted themselves for years to the fight against fascism. Although I felt increasingly close to them, I don't know if I would have decided to commit myself totally to that path: there was too much individual taste, indifference, and critical spirit in me to sacrifice all that to a collective faith. Only the war resolved the situation, sweeping away certain obstacles, clearing the field of many convenient shelters, and brutally bringing me into contact with an irreconcilable world" (G. PINTOR, *Il sangue d'Europa (1939-1943)* [*The Blood of Europe (1939-1943)*], Turin 1965, p. 186). For a context for these words in terms of Pintor's personality and education, see B. CEVA, *X proposito di G. Pintor e la letteratura della Resistenza*, in "Il movimento di liberazione in Italia," January-March 1970, p. 73.

¹ A typical example of this is the case of G. Ungaretti who, on December 1, 1940, sent a letter from Brazil, where he was at the time and where he had learned of the tragic failure of the attack on Greece, to some "friends" to be forwarded to Mussolini in which, after stating that he had "never had as much faith in the Duce as he did at that moment," he said he was ready to return to Italy and, if the "Duce" considered him of any use, to spread propaganda among the troops on the front line (see F. PETROCCHI, *Lettere inedite di Ungaretti a Mussolini (1922-1942)*, in "Letteratura italiana contemporanea," January-August 1987, p. 223, where, however, the letter is erroneously dated 1941 instead of 1940).

² After the war, when questioned about this collaboration, Calamandrei replied that it was a consultation requested by D. Grandi from him, Carnelutti, and Redenti as critics of the draft code prepared by his predecessor, A. Solmi, and knowing his political ideas well, and he added that it was therefore "the independent work of a scientist aimed at improving (or making less worse) a code that was to serve not the fascists but the Italian people," no different from that of a clinician interested in building the best possible sanatorium or [that] of an engineer perfecting the mechanisms of the locomotives used by the State Railways" (see P. CALAMANDREI, *Letters 1915-1956*, edited by G. Agosti and

A. Galante Garrone, II, Florence 1968, pp. 211 ff. and in particular pp. 213 ff.; as well as A. GALANTE GARRONE,

and their subsequent anti-fascism and communism (since it was communism rather than democratic cultures and parties that mainly attracted intellectuals and former fascist hawks) suggests not so much a cultural break as a continuing loyalty to a worldview and political ideology that they had first sought to realize through fascism, then through anti-fascism and communism in particular; However, this rarely took place through a *process* of gradual, uninterrupted maturation from a left-wing interpretation of fascism (such as that which prevailed around 1936 and subsequently went into crisis in the face of the regime's totalitarian turn in the years between Italy's intervention in Spain and its entry into the Second World War) to militant anti-fascism. As Galli rightly observed their maturation was not a continuous process, but "suffered a sudden interruption in 1940-41 when the fascist war appeared victorious thanks to Germany or at least of uncertain outcome." In addition to placing the *ad quem* in 1941 instead of the last months of 1942, where, in our opinion, Galli is mistaken in attributing this interruption to the repressive action of the regime and its ability to recover "within the cultural dialectic, under the control of the party, the majority of young people with critical tendencies, but still much closer, especially after Spain, to victorious fascism than to the various tendencies of anti-fascism, once again defeated." While grasping an essential point of the question, Galli's explanation does not go beyond the traditional patterns within which many aspects of fascist reality have been - in some cases by the fascists themselves - and are still too simplistically viewed and explained. To understand the attitude...

For the younger intellectuals and the young people of the Guf, the repression and demagoguery of fascism were of little use. It is more useful to refer to what they thought, to their pursuit of the myth of a social revolution and a 'new fascism' (conceived in different ways, but which in all its versions was opposed to the official one that the totalitarianization of the regime had made many of them believe to be unachievable, but which now, however, the war - understood by them as a social, if not proletarian, rather than a national war - made it seem achievable again, and charged it with new ethical and cultural meanings and related psychological implications: war as asceticism, as regeneration, as an event that marked the end and beginning of two eras, one historicist and humanitarily vile, the other vitalistic and based on the transcendent value of the awareness of a collective destiny of death and resurrection from which a new civilization would spring, regenerated and organized on the basis of the values of technology rather than those of tradition and ideology.

As regards Bottai and the meaning to be attributed to "Primato," it should first be noted that the idea of complementing "Critica fascista" with an artistic-literary magazine was developed by the Minister of National Education before the situation in Europe deteriorated and, initially, was nothing more than a sort of development of a proposal by Giorgio Vecchietti, who, not coincidentally, would take over the management of

"Primato" and, together with editor-in-chief Giorgio Gabella, he would have been the one to actually produce the magazine. Vecchietti had repeatedly suggested including a literary and artistic supplement in "Critica fascista"; Bottai initially dismissed the idea, but when he finally accepted it, he preferred to create a separate publication, which they would both edit, even though in practice, as Bottai did not want to neglect Critica fascista, Vecchietti would be the actual editor. Mussolini was informed of the project (in mid-February 1939) and rejected the title proposed by Vecchietti, "Ulisse," approving instead the one Bottai had kept in reserve, "Primato." The announcement of the magazine's forthcoming publication was made by

"Critica fascista" on August 15, 1939; However, the first issue only saw the light of day seven months later, when Italy had not yet entered the war and Bottai was thinking, rather than of Italy's intervention alongside Germany, of a "reversal of Germany's position against Russia, with a revival of the anti-Bolshevik motif" and, therefore, of "at least half a century of peace."

And—according to what he wrote to ^{Pellizzi}¹ during those very days—in a perspective that is difficult to consider as *an active policy of intellectuals* to be implemented in the event of war:

the problem is not to produce a 'literary' literary magazine, but a magazine with a broad and superior political vision: that is, one that measures the political values implicit in every literary manifestation, both collective and individual.

Nor do we see anything that would suggest a real change in this perspective as a result of Italy's entry into the war three months later. Bottai's exhortations to "courageous harmony" and "cultural interventionism" in *Primato* are not substantially different from those found in the interventionist and generally patriotic publications of 1915 and, apart from the tone and some "learned" references, those of the fascists of the same period. Nor can it be thought that Bottai had any doubts about the outcome of the conflict. At that time, in fact, his only doubts concerned, if anything, the post-war period and what it would mean in relation to his conception of fascism.

We will win the war, he wrote from Albania on March 3, 1941, to his friend Pellizzi². We will also win peace. But will we ever achieve peace, that is, order, in our ideas, in our principles, in our working methods?

The notes for Ciano and Mussolini dated July 13 and 19, 1940, and above all the letter-report addressed to the latter on July 20, published by us in the Appendix to the second volume of ^{the} previous ^{volume},³ show attention and even concern for the situation that would arise in Europe after the victory of the Axis, undoubtedly greater than that found in other members of the fascist leadership and, at the same time, a considerable awareness of the importance of the contribution that culture would immediately have to make in various fields of specialization. than that found in other members of *the* Fascist *leadership* and, at the same time, a considerable awareness of the importance of the contribution that culture in various fields of specialization would immediately have to make in order to enable the regime to face, as Germany had been doing for some time, the problems of the postwar period with its own concrete prospects and proposals. In his letter-report of July 20, which he personally delivered to Mussolini on August 12, Bottai also addressed other issues, in particular the attitude of culture towards the regime and the war and the need to immediately set to work on developing a "corporate plan of an international nature." With regard to the former, his judgment was extremely harsh, both towards culture,

One might think that all this either has no connection with the problem of "Primacy" or indirectly ends up confirming the now traditional view of the magazine and the faction formed by Bottai through it: given that the intellectuals on whom one could rely were essentially scientists and technicians, Bottai would have tried to mitigate or, at least, make less visible the detachment and hostility of writers and artists by offering them the opportunity to write in a prestigious magazine, which gave them greater freedom of discussion than others and did not explicitly address political and ideological issues. In reality, things are different. First of all, we now know that Bottai's letter-report to Mussolini was actually written by Ugo Spirito. Upon receiving it, the minister simply deleted the few lines that revealed that it was not his and delivered it to Mussolini as his own. This does not mean that it did not largely reflect his thinking and that it was not to a large extent the result of previous exchanges of ideas between the two; the issue is another, and it is enough to compare the central themes of the letter with what Spirito would write in *La Guerra Rivoluzionaria* (*The Revolutionary War*) to realize this. Consistent with his view of the war and, more generally, of the Italian reality in relation to fascism, Spirito, in his letter to Bottai, placed great emphasis, as we have seen, on the attitude of the 'humanist' bourgeois intellectuals, probably dramatizing it more than Bottai himself would have done, and, in fact, he concluded his argument by reaching the conclusion that an international corporative plan was necessary, which - if it had been given the green light by Mussolini - would have led to a revival or relaunch of the entire corporative discourse, as he had hinted at the Ferrara conference and which Bottai had not felt able to endorse at the time, but which Spirito now had to be persuaded would support in order to develop an Italian perspective capable of addressing the problems of the post-war period and, in concrete terms, the future "New Order." This was what Bottai considered most important and urgent, and what Spirito intended to leverage. The philosopher was not mistaken, as demonstrated by the two summaries that Bottai gave in his diary of the conversations he had

with Mussolini on the 12th (when he handed him the letter-report) and on August 13 (when the "Duce," after reading it, wanted to talk to him about it)¹:

August 12, 1940 Audience at Palazzo Venezia, for official business... I give him a long letter I wrote on the position of Italian culture, especially university culture, in the face of the European conflict: the crisis of idealism and nationalism; the attempt at cultural renewal based on the Corporation, between 1930 and 1934, which culminated in the Congress of Ferrara; the progressive segregation of culture from 1934 onwards; through the wars in Abyssinia and Spain, culture arrives at this war without any capacity to participate, disheartened, indifferent, even hostile, in a state of reaction to the revolutionary movement that is spinning ever more rapidly around the Rome-Berlin axis; the need to revive the forces of culture, focusing on young people, encouraging and engaging them to address the problems of the new Europe, its political, economic, and social structure. These are the main points of my letter, which I deliver without great illusions.

i) August 1940 Mussolini calls me. He reads my letter and responds point by point. He acknowledges that between 1930 and 1934, culture moved closer to revolution on the wave of corporatism, but the wars interrupted this movement: "It's natural, the cannons thunder, culture is silent"; and he predicts that the interruption will continue. "Because," he says, "I already foresee the war that will come after this one. What will be the new economic order in Europe? We will have to see what the United States and Russia do. Above all, will Russia be with Europe or against Europe? That remains to be seen." What can culture do while it waits? Little, he seems to conclude. However, he accepts my proposal to promote a wide-ranging university discussion on the themes of the new Europe: an internal discussion, I explain, without publicity, "cellular," "conventual." We agree that we will see what good comes of it.

To get to the heart of the matter, we can say that the whole story of "Primato," its birth as the actual design pursued by Bottai, lies in this succession and interpenetration of influences: Vecchietti-Bottai, Spirito-Bottai, Mussolini-Bottai.

When he began publishing the magazine, Bottai simply wanted to satisfy two needs: Vecchietti's request to give more space to literary and artistic topics in *Critica fascista*; a prospect that he undoubtedly found very appealing, not only because it would allow him to establish closer and less official relationships with the intellectual world than he already had as Minister of National Education, but also because it would distinguish his image in his own eyes from that of the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Popular Culture and

those leaders—especially Farinacci—who also sought to influence that world, but also because he himself was, at heart, a *man of letters*; and that of not depriving *Critica fascista* of its primary character as a magazine engaged in an ideological battle within the regime and fascism; an exquisitely political battle in which excessive commitment to the literary and artistic field would have brought more disadvantages than advantages at that time. Apart from this, there must have been very little behind the birth of *Primato*, certainly not the design of a new strategy in *intellectual politics*. And even considering that, given the gravity of the moment, Bottai was capable of crossing the limits of what was "permissible" and challenging Mussolini's hostility (which he essentially expressed in their conversation on

August 13, defining the silence of culture as "natural" "when the cannon thunders") to any old or new *policy of intellectuals*, the fact remains that for him the "new civilization," the "new man," the "new humanism," as he put it, could only spring from totalitarian intransigence, moral even before political, and from consequent and consistent action by the state. In this vision (which in previous years had won him the sympathy of many young people), intellectuals, in his opinion, had an essential role to play for the regime, whose fate depended in the long term on its ability to obtain, organize, and utilize their consent and collaboration in the ongoing construction of the "new state," that is, the corporative state, which Bottai considered the only solution to the problems of the modern world. This meant focusing on the hegemonic function of intellectuals, but above all on those intellectual "skills" of a technical-operational nature (lawyers, economists, political scientists, etc.) that alone could energize a new, truly fascist ruling class and create the institutions and functional mechanisms of the corporative state. For others, particularly writers and artists, this perspective left them with very limited scope, and it is difficult to believe that Bottai would have considered opposing Mussolini on their behalf.

It took Italy's entry into the war for the "*Primato*" line to become more precise. However, it is necessary to be very clear on this point as well. Italy's participation in the conflict did not heighten Bottai's interest in the problem of intellectuals, nor did it induce him to change his basic vision, either general (ideological) or specific (with regard to intellectuals). The real problem of the moment for him became that of *do-*

po; that of the new reality that would arise from the victory of the Axis in all fields, and above all in the field of Italian-German political, economic, ideological, and cultural relations, and between the Axis powers individually and other countries, and, as a consequence, also within the regime.

In other words, the real and decisive problem for him became that of the New Order. This was all the more so because, while in Germany it had already been under consideration for some time and its hegemonic tendencies, including towards Italy, were already clearly discernible, here, on the other hand, no one was seriously concerned with it, thus leaving the Germans free to lay the groundwork for it based solely on their own interests. It is impossible to determine how much Ugo Spirito's influence played a part in Bottai's awareness of the absolute necessity for Italy and the regime to address the problem of the New Order. What can be said with certainty is that it was undoubtedly considerable and that of the entire Spirito-Bottai discussion set out in the letter-report delivered to Mussolini on August 12, the only point on which Bottai managed to obtain from the "Duce" (who was far from inclined at that moment to take any serious steps that he knew deep down he could not take or considered from a perspective that he did not want to reveal) was to promote a "wide-ranging university discussion on the themes of the New Europe," to be held strictly within the university world and without publicity.

With such limited approval—which was even more restrictive than the approval Mussolini had given Pellizzi two months earlier for the establishment of "scientific groups" (central and peripheral) of the National Institute of Fascist Culture—very little could be achieved. In Spirito's eyes, probably nothing serious, so much so that, while continuing to keep in touch with Bottai and giving him suggestions, the philosopher devoted most of his efforts in the following year to writing his book on *Revolutionary War* in the hope of convincing Mussolini to reconsider his position and truly address the problem of the Or-

new in all its implications, both domestic and international; and, after the "Duce" expressed to Bottai (who had given it to him to read) his negative opinion on some of the theses of this "intelligent but contradictory" and politically incorrect work, he began to move closer and closer to Pellizzi and the CNFC, whose research activities, limited as they were, must have seemed more concrete to him than those of Bottai, who in the meantime had been reduced to carrying out

Bottai's reaction must have been different. A better connoisseur of Mussolini's spirit and, therefore, almost certain of the impossibility of changing his mind and, at the same time, accustomed as he was to exploiting any circumstance and possibility politically, he had to consider that, although limited to the theme of the "new Europe," the

series of other problems directly connected with the concepts of mass, organization, and hierarchy. And so, to the first question and in relation to it, we can add, for example, some of the following:

- Whether and in what sense the current revolution implies a transformation of the concept of *freedom* in a speculative, political, legal, and economic sense.
- Whether and in what sense there is a transformation of the concept of *culture*.
- Whether and in what sense *politics* and *technique* or *competence* should be identified.
- Whether the identification of politics and technique should imply the elimination of the parliamentary system and all its prerequisites (representation, elections, universal suffrage, political parties, majority rule, etc.).
- Whether and in what sense the tasks of the institutions of the parliamentary system can be performed by the new corporate institutions.
- Whether and in what sense the concept of political and economic balance in the national and international arena should be eliminated.
- Whether and in what sense autarchy can be conceived of as existing in a corporate international society.

These and many other general issues must be discussed within the scope of individual areas of expertise in order to develop a body of doctrines appropriate to political transformation. But the same issues must then be addressed in a more limited context so that we are ready to resolve them when peace is established. The transition from a state of war to a state of peace already poses problems whose solution requires the collaboration of culture, based on historical and technical experience to date. Here too, a few examples of questions are worth considering:

- How the transition from a war economy to a peacetime economy should be organized.
- Whether it is advisable to abandon the gold standard and how it can be replaced.
- Whether the problem of unemployment can be solved other than through a programmatic economy.
- How the problem of the redistribution of raw materials can be solved through a programmatic international economy.
- How the sovereignty of small nations economically linked to large ones can be maintained and understood.

¹ For the story of the *Revolutionary War*, see, in addition to G. BOTTAI, *Diary*, p. 290 (November 29, 1941), which reports Mussolini's opinion of Bottai after reading the typescript, the introductory essay by G. RASI, *La rivoluzione corporativa; U. SPIRITO, Guerra rivoluzionaria* cit.

² In 1942, U. Spirito participated in the preparation of the first (and only) National Conference of ICNF Scientific Groups (November 23-26) and actively contributed to both topics discussed at the conference: *The Idea of Europe* and the *Second Economic Plan*. Stenographic reports of both topics have been preserved; those on the "Idea of Europe" are in confidential drafts, while those on the *economic plan* are partly in drafts and partly in typescripts (in the *U. Spirito Foundation Archive*). Spirito did not take part in the conference for the study of the economic problems of the New Order, held in Pisa from May 18 to 23, 1942, and organized by the University's School of Advanced Studies in Corporate Disciplines.

The Duce's *approval* offered considerable room for maneuver, especially with regard to Primato. Having a free hand to frame the issue of the New Order in historical, political, and cultural terms in general must have seemed much more positive to him than to Spirito, for whom other, more *concrete* and immediately political issues were more important. This was all the more so because addressing the problem of the New Order in cultural terms had the dual advantage of a) allowing a discussion that was not explicitly political—which, in any case, on the Italian side could only have been addressed "in code" —on the future relationship between Italy a n d Germany a n d their respective positions with regard to the rest of Europe; b) offering a vision of the war a n d Italy's participation in it that was not only new but also *moral a n d revolutionary*, drawing on a series of motives that were deeply felt by a large part of the Fascist youth a n d which could also appeal t o a certain number of intellectuals in whom, on the one hand, Mazzinian a n d Giobertian ideas were still alive a n d , on the other, old a n d new anti-English prejudices a n d hostilities coexisted with anti-German ones without finding an intimate accommodation.

Read in this light, "Primacy" regains its true character, as-
more political than cultural and much less focused than is often said on a new form of *intellectual politics*. It would otherwise be difficult to explain why, when Vecchietti and Gabella were called up for military service shortly after the declaration of war, Bottai even considered closing the magazine—an idea that can only be explained by his conviction, first, that the war would end very quickly a n d , second, with the discouragement caused in him by the dramatic turn it had taken in G r e e c e — a n d , despite Vecchietti's resistance, he decided to entrust its management t o a person he did not even know, Tommaso Bozza, whose name had been suggested to him by Vecchietti himself, except that, once the war with Greece had ended positively, he became convinced that "history had proved Mussolini r i g h t" a n d the most optimistic predictions about the outcome of the war began to flourish again. At the same time, however, concerns about t h e future balance of power between Germany a n d Italy grew, leading him to believe

- as he wrote to Bozza on April 23, 1941 - that in the new phase that was unfolding for Italy, Primato should become a tool "essential to our purposes" and that, therefore, it was necessary to "take great care of it" and "give it the right tone." What this meant is explained by some editorial choices made in the months that followed, such as, on the one hand, the less eclectic tone adopted by the magazine (no longer or much less theater,

cinema, music, records) in order to focus on literature, the arts, and above all history, i.e., on topics more suited to developing a discourse in terms of national culture, a new order different from that sought by the Germans and, as far as possible, an ideological distancing from Nazism that could bring the sympathies of other European countries to converge on Italy and, on the other hand, the diversion to "Critica fascista" of some contributors whose positions were less in line with this orientation.

The famous debates on Hermeticism (probably suggested to Bottai by G. Manacorda), on the relationship between universities and culture (behind which Spirito must have been at least partly responsible), on existentialism and even, in a certain sense more explicitly ideological-political, on "new romanticism," as well as the recurring interventions on the problem of young people, appear in fact, to an unbiased reader, to be only a sort of framework within which the problem of the "new Europe" and, more generally, of the New Order was increasingly placed, and they were all more or less aimed at it. On the contrary, from this perspective, the historical column and, above all, a series of articles, some published as editorials, which Carlo Morandi wrote for *Primato* in 1940-42 (since in 1942 he too began to move closer to Pellizzi and the ICNF, with which he had been collaborating since 1940) become central. This is not only because they provide a good account of what were to be the specific aspects and, at the same time, the general approach to the theme of the 'new Europe' and the New Order that Bottai tended to assert through the magazine (it is significant in this regard that a reworked and more politicized version of Morandi's articles, *Guerra per l'Europa* [*War for Europe*], was published in a pamphlet in the series *Questa guerra* [This War] series edited by G. Gabella), but also because they allow a comparison between Bottai's approach and what was said and written on the subject of the New Order by other Fascist exponents and - more importantly for us - by intellectuals belonging to other groups and by the youth press, which, as we shall see, devoted a great deal of space to 'Europeanism' throughout the war.

fascist" and to the meaning and *values* that the New Order should have had both in relations between nations and peoples and with regard to the evolution of fascism and the construction of a "new society." A "new society" which, moreover, was seen, especially by young people, but not only by them and even by numerous contributors to *Primato*, such as Galvano Della Volpe, in a psychological and moral context—that of the new "ethics of war"—which had nothing in common with the ideological-political conception that Bottai had been an advocate of. Galvano Della Volpe, in a psychological and moral context—that of the new "ethics of war"—that had nothing in common with the ideological-political conception that Bottai had been advocating for years, but from which, while continuing to consider it the only valid one, he quickly ended up accepting that *Primato* would increasingly diverge, almost certainly fearing that he would lose contact with the 'new fascism' and remain isolated from all fascist tendencies and power groups. As Zapponi rightly observed:

The new "ethics of war" was in conflict... with the ideological stance that, for about twenty years, had constituted, so to speak, the second soul of fascism; with the political conception, to be clear, of Bottai's "party," historicist and "revisionist," asserting a natural and dialectical continuity between past and present. In fact, nothing could be less compatible with the interpretation of war as an event that marked the end of an era and at the same time initiated a process of regeneration "from below" (not mediated, therefore, by the presence of an 'organizing' state), the ideology emanating from the editorial writings published regularly on the front pages of Bottai's latest magazine, and the very name '*Primato*' imposed on it, laden with obvious references to Vincenzo Gioberti's Catholic-Risorgimento theses.

This confirms our interpretation of Bottai's position and that of "Primacy" as dictated much more by political than cultural ends and not so much by rebellion, and, moreover, by a failed operation both as an attempt to make the relationship between intellectuals and the regime more organic and from the point of view of Bottai's particular ideological-political conception of fascism. Unless we want to reduce it - as has been done - to an operation aimed at strengthening Bottai's personal position within fascism (which at the beginning of the war was already weaker than we might think) by leveraging the fact that his magazine attracted many of the most influential figures in culture and some of the most promising young intellectuals. This hypothesis may well have some truth to it, but in our opinion it can only be considered as one aspect of the story.

accessory and additional to what ^{has been said so far} and, in any case, late, following the defeat in Egypt and the Allied landing in North Africa. But, even in this case, the results were not at all positive, because Primato, rather than strengthening Bottai's position, ended up weakening it even further, exposing him to more or less veiled accusations of "anti-fascism" by the intransigent² further lowering his credibility even among many young fascists to whom Primato ended up appearing to be a typical product of the duplicity of so much *of the fascist establishment*, and all this without succeeding either - as the magazine had initially set out to do - in 'accelerating the arduous and slow process of transforming customs' intellectuals, nor to arouse in them, not even in those who wrote for it, a commitment that would induce them - when the war was clearly going downhill - to put aside their doubts, as had happened after Caporetto, recite the "mea culpa," and face the danger of defeat. In conclusion, as we have already had occasion to say, it seems to us that Primato's position towards intellectuals and, all things considered, also towards young people, at least until the second half of 1942, did not differ greatly from that of fascism as a whole, except for its *modus operandi*, which was more prudent, skillful, persuasive, aware of the moods, sensitivities, and weaknesses of intellectuals and the most widespread sentiments among young people; careful to identify its real adversaries (first and foremost the influence of Croce), so as not to lash out left and right against adversaries who were both dangerous and inno-

which were either non-existent or even non-existent, resulting in a heavy climate that ultimately affected the regime in particular, and willing to use against them ideas and motifs from other cultural heritages (especially the Catholic one) that were less dangerous and in any case less resistant to being put into practice, and to act against them not with a frontal attack from the outside, but with an enveloping tactic from within the world of culture itself.

In conclusion, it is no exaggeration to say that during the war years, the regime essentially had no *policy on intellectuals*. This was partly because Mussolini himself did not want one, and partly because the vast majority of Fascist leaders either did not really feel the need for one, or confused cultural action with propaganda, or, at best, had very different ideas about how it should be understood and, above all, implemented. Given this reality, even the institutions that in theory should have been most concerned with culture and intellectuals who were not part of the regime or who did not carry out their activities as scholars and technicians in organizations that worked for it did not find, on the one hand, the support (including financial) and the margins of autonomy they would have needed (typical in this regard are the underestimation, mistrust, and restrictions that characterized the party's attitude towards the activities of the ICNF) and, on the other hand, for a long time they practically ran in vain or carried out activities that had little or nothing to do with culture and intellectuals¹: that is, they had to devote themselves to other initiatives whose field of action was more abroad than in Italy and which, in accordance with Mussolini's strategy for the New Order, had objectives that mainly concerned foreign policy.

the consequence not only of distancing rather than bringing closer intellectuals who were partially critical and "under the tent" from the regime and the war, but also of deepening the divisions between the various cultural currents within the regime and causing them to take on values that often favored the transition

Germans and to present, at least on a cultural level, the Italian "philosophy" of the New Order and its differences from the German one, were the Deutsche-italienische Gesellschaft (which published the monthly magazine *Italien* in Hamburg from 1942 to 1944, edited by Egon Vietta), whose board of directors included the former ambassador to Rome Ulrich von Hassel, and the Istituto Studia Humanitatis (directed by Professor Leonardo Grassi, see G. BOTTAI, *Diario* cit., pp. 284, 309 and 342), which was inaugurated in 1942 by Bottai (see the report he sent to Mussolini on that occasion in *the Bottai Archive*, which shows that the Institute also benefited from the collaboration of the academic Riccobono and had the support of Kerényi). In the fall of 1942 and again in the early months of 1943, Bottai worked to establish a chair of Italian civilization history in Berlin, which he wanted Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli to fill (see R. BIANCHI BANDINELLI *Dal diario di un borghese e altri scritti*, Milan 1976,

than some of the fascist intellectuals in communism, and not to value (and sometimes look down on and even distrust) and not to make good use of the contribution that intellectuals could have made.

"technicians" who were certainly not inferior to those of other countries: consider, for example, the opinion of J. A. Schumpeter, according to whom Italian economic reflection continued to remain at the high level during World War II that had made it "second to none" in the previous thirty years. Not to mention another consequence: that of finding oneself in the position of having to use, for mass cultural propaganda—to which the party tended to reduce everything—intellectuals who were almost always of the lowest level and completely inadequate for the task, and who not only failed to achieve any results, but ended up further demoralizing people and discrediting the regime even more.

Finally, as regards the actual attitude towards the majority of "humanist" intellectuals, it was effectively reduced to the old philosophy of the carrot and the stick. Of *vigilance* and, beyond a certain limit of 'tolerance', to various degrees of repression (warnings, cautions, per-

civilians of others. This judgment was not based on practical, economic, military, or other considerations; it was based on a *a priori* and purely spiritual criterion. This criterion can be said to be disinterested; or, in any case, it refers to an interest that is not subjective but felt to be universal; it is assumed that even the victims of this judgment, if they had the light of intellect, would accept it as just. In other words, judgment is made not only in the interest of those who are exalted, but also, and more importantly, in the interest of those who are condemned; judgment is made in the interest of all, assuming that it is in the interest of all that positive values be exalted and negative values condemned.

And it is this innate *human* feeling that compels us to act in society, so that it may achieve higher values and overcome the lower ones. And it is this feeling that compels us to want a society that is a *hierarchy of equals*. This concept may seem strange and contradictory, but it is fundamental. People are very different, but not so different that a comparison cannot be made between them all; there is no civilization or race so low that it cannot represent something in the great picture of humanity. By saying that our sense of value surpasses and transcends all individuals and individual facts, we also mean that it includes them all; since it judges them all, it cannot exclude any of them *a priori*; nothing can be entirely foreign to our sense of civilization. But, for the same reason, nothing can escape the will of civilized man, which is always to achieve a higher order in human affairs. We accept every human reality because we must judge it in terms of its practical effects; after judging, we must act accordingly. We must act, not for our own interest, but in accordance with those values that are valid for all. We therefore see around us a world of equals, but equals who must be hierarchically ordered, in order and according to the individual values to which the different hierarchies refer. And since all human things are in perpetual evolution, and the values of individual men are always changing, we would like hierarchies to be in perpetual evolution as well, and in a continuous process of adaptation...

The corporate principle is, in my opinion, the political expression of Western Christian tradition. A tradition of thought and feeling that has instilled in us, in all of us, the concept that every human being is, even if only potentially, the bearer of an absolute value. Only the West, with its high "aristocratic" sense of the value of personality, could take this concept and translate it into lasting and civilly useful institutions. When we deplore the massacres carried out by Russian communism, we do not do so out of a weak impulse of compassion, out of a womanly dislike of displays of force; an epidemic, due to poor organization of sanitation services in a given society, could kill more people than the communists have killed. What we deplore is seeing human beings used as objects and not as subjects of history; it is seeing leaders who use humanity as a means and not as an end. A man who has a high regard for himself cannot fail to feel a residual respect for any other man. Therefore, I believe that the Aryan and Nordic sentiment of aristocracy, which I have mentioned, is destined to manifest itself at some point as a corporate principle; and I believe that this must happen even if we disregard the Western Christian tradition of the last twenty

labor, arrest) and large-scale *corruption* (to the point that on June 19, 1943, speaking at the headquarters of the National Fascist Party, the Minister of Popular Culture Polverelli stated that "most of our literati," while not living the life of fascism, were "almost all subsidized."¹) This was also understood and practiced in various forms and degrees inspired by a mixture of realism, unscrupulousness, and cynicism (and sometimes petty patronage), which was in turn often the result of the complex social and personal relationships that had developed over the years between fascist intellectuals (especially those in positions of bureaucratic power) and disengaged, vaguely critical, and resigned intellectuals, ranging from "turning a blind eye," to using the right people in the right places and 'keeping everyone alive' (in 1940, among the readers of the General Press Directorate tasked with examining foreign books for possible translation was even the widow of one of the most illustrious victims of fascism) to commissioning (even at a loss) various works, granting subsidies, contributions, and even subsidies (often modest, but valuable to those who received them), fixed or occasional for a wide variety of reasons, managing purchases for libraries and galleries, assigning certain projects and commissioning certain works of art based on criteria that sometimes included a "scattergun" approach in order to satisfy even minor professionals and artists, etc.

As long as the course of the war appeared unaffected and even generally favorable to the Tripartite, this management of intellectuals seemed satisfactory to Mussolini and the various organs of the party and state directly involved in the problem: despite their inherent limitations, certain "deafness," misunderstandings, and tendencies to distance themselves from the reality of the country at war, the problems that intellectuals posed to the regime were relatively minor compared to those posed by other social categories, especially since, in general, they constituted a heterogeneous reality, closed in on itself and with little ability to understand the real problems of others and to make themselves understood by them and, therefore, to have influence in the country or had it almost exclusively on a part of the bourgeois youth, so that their problem ended up, if anything, being one and the same as that of young people for the regime. An attempt to innovate the criteria for managing the problem of intellectuals only took place towards the end of 1942 and especially in 1943, in parallel with the deterioration of the military situation, the first signs of reorganization of the anti-fascist parties, and above all the many

The spread of spontaneous opposition groups and the growing demands of fascist intransigence meant that, on the one hand, drastic measures had to be taken against all those—intellectuals in particular—who did not feel the gravity of the moment and continued to shirk their responsibilities, to show lukewarm support, and to rebel. On the other hand, all the energy and skills necessary to overcome the crisis were mobilized. This led not only to increased surveillance and repression, but also to a resumption of initiatives (aimed above all at relaunching Italian politics for the New Order advocated by Bastianini) and the launch of a number of projects and programs aimed at strengthening and rationalizing the cultural activities of the regime and, above all, the institutions that were supposed to preside over them, in particular the INCF and the Center for Studies and Action for the New Order, which, however, were destined not to materialize due to the onset of the crisis of July 25.

At this point, two clarifications are necessary. The first may be considered obvious, even redundant: it was certainly not with those means that the regime could recover at that point, much less obtain the consent of intellectuals. The second, on the other hand, is less obvious in some respects: if this was now impossible and ultimately unthinkable even for the fascists, it was nevertheless a fact that, despite the crisis of the regime, only a part, an elite of intellectuals—mostly of pre-fascist training and never really compromising with fascism—had clear ideas about how to behave, what to want; most behaved in much the same way as the rest of the bourgeoisie, often fearing the future no less than the present, having few or no connections outside their own circles and, not knowing in essence how to behave in practical terms (if, indeed, lacking strong convictions, they were not afraid to expose themselves and lose the benefits that the regime still guaranteed them), they either shut themselves away in a sort of fearful isolation or continued to behave like 'good Italians' and even 'good fascists', or cautiously tried to keep, so to speak, a foot in both camps. In practice, and at the point where things had reached, this was to the advantage of the regime, for which the ambiguous behavior and passivity of most people created a series of problems, but

¹ The Center was established in 1941 after the start of operations against the USSR on the basis of the previous Anti-Communist Study Center, active from 1936 to 1940 at the General Directorate of Propaganda of the Ministry of Popular Culture, which was tasked with collecting documentation on the activities of the Comintern and maintaining contact with anti-communist movements in other countries and influencing them in accordance with Italian policy (so much so that it was also supervised and financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). This first center was dissolved in 1940 after the Nazi-Soviet agreement of the previous year. For initial information, including on the restructuring that began in 1943, see ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto*, b. 33, fasc. 438, 'Centro studi anticomunisti ora Centro di Studi e di Azione per l'Ordine Nuovo'; A. Rossi, *Figlio del mio tempo. Rifascismo-Fascismo-Postfascismo*, Rome 1969, pp. 192 ff.

The renovation projects and related ICF activity programs are documented in an undated "Memorandum on the ICF" (confidential), but dating from early 1943, submitted to the deputy secretary of the National Fascist Party, Carlo Ravasio, by Camillo Pellizzi, a copy of which is kept in the *Pellizzi Archive*.

They also ensured reasonable certainty that opposition from intellectuals, at least for the time being, would not go beyond certain limits and could therefore be kept largely under control. Thus, the real problem for the regime remained that of spontaneous groups, which were the only ones capable, given the backwardness of the process of rebuilding the anti-fascist parties and the limited forces on which they could still count, of exerting effective influence within other social categories, at least among some of the other intellectuals and especially among young people.

The issue of young people facing fascism, and in particular their attitude during the war, has had a fate in academic studies that is in some ways similar to that of culture and intellectuals, with which it is partly identified - although not entirely - given the social background and education of the vast majority of those referred to when discussing youth and its relationship with the regime. There is still no comprehensive reference study on this subject, and the situation is even more deficient when it comes to specific studies. Apart from the *Littoriali della cultura* (which, however, were suspended at the national level in 1940, coinciding with Italy's entry into the war), which have been the focus of attention (in truth more political, and sometimes scandalous, than scientific) of numerous authors and which have fueled a not rich, but interesting memoirs² and provided material for a series of general considerations (which, however, very often relate more to the specific theme of youth than to that of culture and intellectuals *in the broad sense*, and not infrequently from the particular perspective of the Bottai-youth relationship, which, while valid for the years up to 1939-40, is completely reductive for those that followed).

cessive), very little, almost nothing, has been done to explore the attitudes of young people during the war years, the many ways in which they faced the reality of war, their ideas—or rather, their moods and aspirations, which were very diverse and constantly evolving—moral, social and political, the countless magazines and small journals (many of which appeared in 1940-1941) and the numerous inter-university conferences (which sometimes took on the character of mini Littoriali) held in 1940-42 after the end of the Littoriali through which this turmoil can be reconstructed to some extent, shedding light on a series of specific issues about which very little is still known or around which statements and sometimes clichés are repeated slavishly without ever being subjected to the slightest scrutiny. Two examples of this are the difference in behavior between younger and older military personnel and volunteering.

Given this state of research and unable to address the issue as it deserves here, we will limit ourselves, as with intellectuals, to outlining the attitude of young people in broad terms and with particular reference to the aspects that can best help us understand the impact it had on Italian society during the war, the reasons for the concerns that arose in the repressive apparatus of the regime at the beginning of 1943 - early 1943, and the substantially favorable opinions that - as mentioned - Mussolini expressed about young fascists almost until the eve of July 25 and his refusal to put the problem of young people on the agenda of the regime and fascism, as he was asked to do by many parties.

In 1938-39 and again in the early months of 1940, young people showed clear signs, as already ^{mentioned}, of going through a period that could well be described as complex and, from the regime's point of view, difficult. It was a time of rethinking and redefinition, with a strong tendency to redistribute along lines that were in many ways different from those that had broadly prevailed until the war in Ethiopia. It was also a period characterized by a decline in political tension and confidence in fascism, which the emergence of what we have called 'new fascism' was not, on the whole (from the regime's point of view, of course), sufficient to counterbalance. Cases of conversion to anti-fascism were certainly not significant and were sometimes more the result of personal relationships than of deep-rooted convictions. In the Guf, among the young fascists, the dissatisfied, the critics,

However, the number of rebels had been growing and would have been even greater had it not been for the strong and effective myth of Mussolini, which acted as a brake on their proliferation and the radicalization of their criticism. The last Littoriali della Cultura, those in Trieste and Bologna, had denounced not only an overall decline in cultural standards, but also a significant drop in tension compared to previous editions, so much so that Primato wondered whether it might not be appropriate to "proceed with a total revision" of them, so as to make them once again suitable for the sensibilities and needs of young people. But even more important was the spread among young people—among those who had considered themselves fascists until some time before, as well as those on the fringes of fascism—of a growing psychological unease that very often translated into a sort of depoliticization, an estrangement from political life *tout court* and not only from "party" politics.

The Anschluss, the openly conservative, "Vendean" character assumed by Franco's Spain, the "Pact of Steel," and, on the domestic front, the regime's evolution toward an increasingly bureaucratic and authoritarian style, the introduction of the "politics of race," and above all the growing conviction that fascism was incapable of solving Italy's real problems, starting with social ones, were the most important reasons for this stagnation in youth support. A stagnation that had taken on or shown signs of turning into a crisis. Contrary to what one might think, however, Italy's intervention in the conflict had, so to speak, put things back in order.

This is not to say that all young people welcomed it with enthusiasm. Especially at the beginning, when the war seemed likely to last only a few weeks, or a few months at most, large sections of young people viewed it with little or no enthusiasm; as something that, on the one hand, disrupted their daily *routine*, starting with their studies, and on the other hand, would bring about almost no change, if not actually strengthening the traditional social forces and ruling class, intellectual obtuseness, bureaucracy, and the dominance of the old fascists entrenched in power and corrupted by it. Hence, there was a widespread tendency either to avoid going to war, exploiting all the possibilities offered by family social relations, or to make the most of it, either by ensuring a faster (and less tiring) academic career (typical of the demands of university students for a 'guaranteed eighteen'), either by trying to obtain jobs left vacant by those called up for military service, or by considering their participation in it as a means of acquiring merits (the more numerous the medals they would ultimately be awarded, the greater the merits) to be used to further their careers and secure a place in the

The bureaucratic establishment of the regime did not always consider them immature

among friends," even those who had the opportunity to meet some old anti-fascists "in hibernation" rather than finding a light, a stimulus that would direct their disappointments and criticisms onto a new path, an alternative to fascism, drew confirmation of what they already thought about the inadequacy of democracy to ensure a society and a political regime such as they ^{dreamed of}. However, what prevented some of them from crossing over to the other side was above all their cultural background, which placed their homeland above all else:

An inadequate organization must be changed, but this must not be done by destroying a nation or a state; it does not justify betrayal, nor does it justify abandoning convictions that are considered right. In any case, the presence of tradition, attachment to the homeland, and the belief in a permanent moral unity that transcends time and factions ruled out revolt in times of danger²;

For others, the belief that Italy and Europe as a whole, if defeated, would have been irretrievably victims of their "historic enemies," British and Slavic imperialism, for whom opposition to fascism was nothing more than a camouflage, a way to hide their true objectives, which, in the final analysis, were nothing more than the product of two civilizations incompatible with the Roman-Christian one. For others still, the idea that, despite its limitations, errors, and even aberrations, the fascist system was ideally, politically, and socially superior to the bourgeois and communist systems. For them, a return to the old democratic order would have been absurd, placing trust in a world that had had its day or had failed and should therefore simply be buried. As Alfassio Grimaldi wrote:

We could accept that fascism was rejected, but only in order to move forward, not to return to those positions whose shortcomings had justified its rise in the first place. The story began on October 28 of that fateful year: before that, there was stagnation and utopia.

The problem was not to go back, but to move forward: fascism had

had set the problem of overcoming the old democratic world, unanchoring the country's political life from a now worn-out formula: the empty revolving of the parliamentary system, the moral and practical absurdity of entrusting the criterion of truth to the majority, etc. Not in front of, but within fascism, the barricade had to be built, not to tear it down, but to liberate it and rebuild it.¹⁶

It therefore had to be restored to the ideal purity of its origins, freed from the bureaucracy and corruption that had largely resulted from compromising with the bourgeoisie, so that it would finally be able to bring about a true social revolution and with it a

moral and civil "new order" capable of addressing the great problems of the century.

While these were the most widespread beliefs, there were also others, and the panorama of these beliefs and the various states of mind that accompanied them was vast and rich in nuances, cultural influences, and particular experiences, which we will not dwell on here for the sake of brevity. All the more so because, from what has been said so far, it should be clear why, given this reality, the attitude of young people towards the war—especially when it ceased to appear short and easy—did not constitute a worrying problem for the regime and for Mussolini in particular, or even corresponded, if not entirely, certainly in large part, to their expectations. It should also be clear that for that section of young people—not the most numerous, but undoubtedly the most active, combative and, more importantly, morally motivated—who felt that the war was not only and not so much in line with their national-patriotic cultural background, but in a "fascist" perspective (even though they very often gave their fascism a meaning and content very different from what the regime and even the majority of old fascists considered to be true), the war itself took on a very particular character and value: it interrupted the process of rethinking and redefining their attitude towards the regime that had been in place for several years, gave them new energy and revived their hopes for a *new, left-wing* fascism, finally capable of profoundly renewing the moral, political, and social reality of Italy and giving life to a truly *new order*. All this was consistent with what they had been hoping and asking for in vain in the first half of the 1930s.

In June 1942, after various editorial difficulties with the Ministry of

Popular Culture due to its polemical tone, one of these young people who had been politically active and on the front line for several years, Fidia Gambetti, published a book, *Controveleno*, which clearly reflects this attitude. For him, war was "the quickest and surest way" to solve the problems that tormented generations and peoples, especially Italians:

War measures us one by one, checks each person's conscience and pulse, and selects inexorably. Some of the best, unfortunately, will be mowed down along with the weeds. The important thing, however, is to restore a balance of mental and moral values, completely immune to certain environmental vices into which part of the current ruling class has gradually fallen, misinterpreting words and compromising its masculine dignity. The important thing is to recognize those who have the titles, ingenuity, and spirit to do so, to graft onto the experiences of the revolution the critical, albeit passionate, contribution of their selfless cooperation. The important thing is that certain methods still in force, such as Masonic and caste favoritism, be crushed in an exemplary manner.

War is the most propitious occasion, both for its natural course and for the needs it requires. War is the most plausible pretext offered by providence to perform this surgical intervention; after which the revolution will resume its path in full force, with young blood. No longer burdened by the weight of illustrious parasites, influential pensioners who speculate on past merits and those who have been living off their income for many years. The revolution cannot be nostalgic, it must have no regrets; its very return to its principles, to its origins, is a way of renewing itself, projecting itself and committing to the future...

Once old and new accounts have been settled with the surviving reactionary worlds, and the problem of justice and power on a European and intercontinental level has been resolved, the revolution will resume speaking its unmistakable language above all materialistic and contingent concerns, finally chaining every form of rhetoric, banish pompous and anachronistic choreography, as well as the surviving customs and traditions that indicate the weaknesses and stupidity of an era that was fought and overcome at a very high price in the streets.

Names have changed, but the substance of many things has not changed. It would be too easy to carry out a revolution by simply reforming the vocabulary, repainting the signs, and wearing shiny uniforms.

Until that moment, the "fascist revolution" - "forced to entrust its fate to men, relying fortuitously on their ephemeral, fickle, murky virtues that often distort, mislead, and corrupt it," so much so that Mussolini had wasted a great deal of time "above all to remedy the wrongdoing of the men who had been close to him over the years"³ - had only taken its first steps. After the war, it would be

be brought to completion, eradicating "to the blood" its internal enemies and "all the Pharisees and false friends." From that moment on, however, there was much to be done, especially since winning required acting toward everyone with the utmost intransigence.

It is now time to look each other in the eye, to dissect our skulls and our hearts, to know and recognize each other without doubt or deception; it is now time to come to terms with the past, the present, and the future. The problems that await us are too serious and important for our prestige and our destiny, for us to continue to tolerate and endure alongside men of faith such a heavy burden of ancient and deeply flawed memories:

No one was to escape fascist intransigence: the old reactionaries who pretended to be fascists in order to continue doing business and influencing the regime in accordance with their interests; those who, "seated behind the desks of civil service and bureaucracy," undermined from within, weighed down and corrupted "the march of the revolution"; 'big journalism', which was not always up to the task; propaganda workers, very often 'people without culture, without preparation, without dignity and, in the best of cases, without communication skills'; men of culture who did not know how to 'complicate the always elementary problems of men'; the military and all those who, "behind their badges, under their uniforms," hid a mentality that did not adhere "unreservedly, with active intelligence, to the very difficult cause." And the party should have been the last to shy away from it or escape it:

The faithful of the old guard and the very young recruits, already tested on the battlefields, look to the Party with the same hope they had in the best of times. They demand severity, intransigence, and selection. Severity towards our own actions, which must in any case be guided by the highest and most selfless motives of the revolution; fairness, but resolute and ruthless severity towards our own shortcomings, our excesses, our abuses. Rigorous and scrupulous intransigence towards those who prove themselves unworthy, who betray the trust of the Leader, who do not feel the importance of their tasks or who subjugate them to the purposes of personal selfishness. Today, when the Party is the people, when the scalpel is necessary, it can be plunged deep into the gangrene without fear of a crisis of conscience or spiritual confusion. Punishing those who err in an exemplary manner is, in fact, in the atmosphere established by Fascism in the nation, the best way to achieve substantial and lasting propaganda.

Severity and intransigence mean systematic selection of managers. Weeds must be eradicated for the benefit of crops, soil, and good grass; they must be eradicated as soon as possible, at the root. It is useless to try to convince ourselves otherwise, as many sectors are happy to do: there is much to be eradicated, much to be redone, much to be reviewed. But we must realize this and take action without delay.

The Party can and must act in this sense; it is a service that the Revolution and the Duce require of it now more than ever, and one that it is capable, as always, of performing energetically and intelligently.

The timing could not be more appropriate.

Only uncompromising action that does not stop at power, friendships, or recommendations and punishes all false fascists, the incompetent, and the corrupt, combined with respect for the intelligence of Italians ("no lies, which in the long run are discovered and contradicted, but only the truth, useful and necessary") and speaking clearly and loudly, without sparing criticism where necessary, could give the Italian people the unity they needed at that moment:

The Italian people are always on their guard, distrustful by nature and due to painful historical experiences, perpetually wary of being duped and led by the nose. When confronted, they have no reservations, no hesitations, no arguments: they give themselves entirely, body and soul, to the most desperate, the most ephemeral cause, because they cannot repress the impulses of their traditional and genuine generosity, so all you have to do is ask to obtain their unconditional support. By other means, through diplomacy and deception, one provokes his innate shrewdness, behind which he entrenches himself and remains⁽²⁾.

Even a cursory examination of youth magazines, particularly those published by peripheral Guf groups (less influenced by the party) and those launched after Italy entered ^{the war}, as well as some publications of small PNF federations run by young people and trade unions, and reports of numerous inter-university conferences, shows that, especially in 1941-42, statements and demands such as those mentioned above were neither isolated nor limited, so much so that they sometimes appeared in publications such as *Libro e moschetto* and *'Roma fascista'*, which, due to their importance and official status, were more subject (especially the former) to the moderating control of the party leadership, who were always concerned that youthful 'intemperance' could provoke negative reactions in the country and give credence in Italy

and abroad, the image of a divided fascism rather than the "rock-solid" one they wanted to portray. From this point of view, the two years from 1941 to 1942 were in fact the period of the war during which many young people truly believed they were fighting, both at the front and at home, for a new fascism and a new social order. And not only among those who were most politically motivated and active in the Guf groups and publishing initiatives, as systematic research through correspondence and memoirs that are not strictly political would show how this state of mind was also present to some extent among those for whom cultural activity took precedence over political activity and often ended up influencing them and making them participate in the initiatives of the former or set up their own, which were not very different.

That this conviction manifested itself through a myriad of positions and even particular forms of "fascism"³ and on the basis of the most disparate cultural influences (not least Catholicism), ranging from the almost total rejection of Western tradition to its recovery and valorization in a fascist key (and often more or less openly anti-Nazi⁴) of this tradition and in particular of some of its moments and interpreters (typical cases being Mazzini and Pisacane, on whom we shall dwell at length in the next volume), is, all things considered, secondary, just as it is secondary that this conviction almost never managed to take shape in positive proposals that concretely foreshadowed the new fascism and the new social order desired by these young people. Equally, it matters little that the criticisms on which these young people based their demands for renewal and for behavior and intransigence consistent with the needs of the moment were often used instrumentally by this or that hierarchy for their own ends: from the most immediate and urgent

power and competition, of struggle with other leaders, to give authority to his own demands, which were formally the same but substantially antithetical in terms ^{of their aims}. This latter fact would only become truly important in 1943, towards the end of the war, after July 25 and especially after September 8, at the moment of decisive choices, and helps to explain how, among those young people who would choose the Italian Social Republic, a Farinacci, for example, would have had no credibility, and the same would be true of a Bottai among many of those who were already in crisis before July 25 and who would not have joined the RSI. In the midst of the war, however, he had relatively little: some people almost seemed to ignore it, while others saw it as a foregone conclusion that only confirmed their belief that everything in fascism needed to be reviewed and that only Mussolini was a true fascist, the only one in whom they could have complete confidence ^{and} from whom they should take their cue, until - as Architrave wrote in 1941 - to "Becoming Mussolinized."

Until Italy entered the war, the topic most frequently addressed by the youth press was anti-bourgeois polemics. This theme had been present for years, had made inroads even among young people from ^{anti-fascist} families, and had experienced a strong resurgence in 1938 after Mussolini had made it, as ^{mentioned above}, the spearhead of the fascist "cultural revolution." The Littoriali of 1939 had suggested that some sectors of fascist youth considered the Duce's approach to the relationship between fascism and the bourgeoisie to be too limited: it was right to accuse the bourgeoisie of its *mentality*, but the bourgeoisie had to be

also fought as a ^{social} *class*. However, for this tendency to manifest itself clearly, it took the intervention that gave the youth press the opportunity—despite the almost total silence (with the sole exception of *Gerarchia*) of the PNF press, which instead always focused on *the issue of mentality*—to make it explicit and transfer it to the more general discourse on the "revolutionary war," the future that was supposed to result from it, and the way in which it had to be fought in the meantime. For these young people, as Berto Ricci had already written in June 1940:

"This war will advance the revolution, dealing another blow to an old world of rich and poor" and, as many others would later say and write, it would not have been very different from previous wars if it had not ended with the "ruin" of the bourgeoisie and capitalism or, worse, if it had led to the absorption of all classes into the bourgeoisie. This would have meant the failure of the revolution ^{a n d} with it, that of fascism itself. For, as the organ of the PNF federation of Pavia wrote in October 1941, the task of young fascists was to bring about the birth of a "new fascism" from the war, because fascism - not being "made," but "made concrete by daily work" - could not fail to be 'in a certain sense the victim and object' of the war and, therefore, to emerge from it profoundly transformed.

The Gufini periodicals that were most committed to this cause were "Il Lambello" and "Vent'anni in armi," both from Turin, "Architrave" from Bologna, "Il Barco" from Genoa, "Il campanaccio" from Pavia, "Rivoluzione" from Florence. Also on the others and even—as we have already mentioned—

- In some peripheral organs of the PNF led by young members of the Guf, it is easy to find ideas and positions that help to understand how the anti-bourgeois controversy had gradually spread to wider sectors of fascist youth, who until the eve of the intervention were often discouraged and on the verge of withdrawing from political life. the value of a premise to a whole series of speeches and specific demands that for years they had been unable to make or had had to content themselves with making indirectly, reporting them

and reducing them to the realm of corporate issues, while at the same time using them as a *passe-partout* to demonstrate the validity of a series of criticisms that, equally, had not been able to be made explicitly in the past—typical of those directed at the bureaucracy and bureaucratism and the hierarchism that suffocated the regime, eroded it from within and prevented the free development and implementation of 'true' fascism - and to call for absolute intransigence against all 'bourgeois' elements, that is, against all those who, due to their bourgeois mentality, were not true fascists (characteristic of this latter point is a series of articles on the need for an 'anti-bourgeois reclamation' that appeared in May-July 1942 in 'Vent'anni in armi') and were therefore 'outside the homeland'

¹ During the war years, the corporate issue continued to occupy a significant space, especially in the more official or less influential youth press; in the more open-minded and "revolutionary" press, on the other hand, it was less present and sometimes treated with ill-concealed condescension. Rather than the problem of relations between capital and labor, what really mattered to them were the "fundamental revolutionary institutions" that would emerge from the war and, since the war was nothing more than "a form of social revolution," from the ruin of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. See, for example, R. MAZZETTI, *Atto di nascita*, in "Architrave," December 1, 1940; ID., *Perché saranno sconfitti*, ibid., January 1, 1941; G. GUIZZARDI, *Orizzonti corporativi*, ibid., February 1, 1941. Rarely, however, was the corporative problem examined in non-general and non-ideological terms. Among the few cases, see

E. SCALFARI, *Fuori del corporativismo* (Beyond Corporatism), in *Il nuovo occidente*, January 29, 1943, which addresses the problem of the failure of corporatism in the face of the demands of war, focusing on the role played by collective economic bodies, particularly those established by employers' unions. Although the issue addressed is more technical and economic in nature, the failure of corporatism is also at the heart of a series of articles by the same author, *Esigenze e limiti della pianificazione* (*Requirements and limits of planning*), ibid., May 1, 22, and June 3, 1943, in which, after rejecting extreme solutions, he advocates an economy organized around three essential points: a) a geographical territorial plan; b) development based on 'responsible' medium-sized units (factories) 'considered the most suitable for achieving rapid circulation and accumulation of wealth'; c) the rebirth of the 'entrepreneurial class', which, denied in the superior form of the anonymous company, would rise again in the guise of the managers of individual factories.

² In addition to the damage that bureaucracy caused to the functioning of the state apparatus, rendering it unequal to the demands of war, the essential points of the young people's anti-bureaucratic polemic were that bureaucracy - "still a stronghold of bourgeois reaction" - had been the cause of fascism's "inertia" and the main obstacle to its development in terms of effective social justice (see, for example, E. GIORGI, *Tiro a segno*, in "Vent'anni in armi," August 30, 1941; E. PEZZATO, *La burocrazia segna il passo*, in "Roma fascista," October 9, 1941; G. LA TERZA, *Corporazione, amministrazione e burocrazia*, in "Il Barco," March-April 1942).

³ The controversy against hierarchism was raised by Il Lambello as early as August 1940 with an article by F. Carbonetti, *Bonifica nei ranghi* (*Cleansing the Ranks*), which attacked those who criticized the bourgeois spirit while being 'bourgeois themselves, disguised under the protection of a flashy uniform.' It then spread to "Vent'anni in armi," "Rivoluzione," and "Architrave," which made it one of their favorite topics, both in various articles (especially by R. Mazzetti) and in the column "Parlar chiaro," written by E. FACCHINI (see in particular the issues of April 1 and 30, 1941), in which 'the incompetence and utter frivolity' and 'the more or less legal theft' of certain 'high state officials' were denounced, and it was openly requested that "these people" be "definitively sent home by those responsible" or "the young people returning from the trenches will do so by force," given that "there is no longer any place in the hierarchy for certain individuals, but only in prisons, if they are dishonest, or in mental hospitals, if they are megalomaniacs or fanatics."

⁴ See R. MAZZETTI, *Notes on young people*, in "Architrave," April 1, 1941, but above all NOI DI "VENT'ANNI IN ARMI," *Agire*, in "Vent'anni in armi," September 27, 1941.

On September 20, C. RAVASIO, *Pericoli e difetti dell'indulgenza* (*Dangers and shortcomings of indulgence*), referred in *Il popolo d'Italia* to the non "rare cases" in which "in the hands of men, especially politicians," "indulgence becomes compromise, descends into compromise, degenerates into collusion with evil, and finally finds those who sell the idea to gain an advantage" and to the "former adversaries" of the past and the "gray ones" (i.e., those who in other times shied away and avoided political positions) who, thanks to this indulgence, crowded the party and, "out of fear, precaution, conservative and reactionary spirit," slowed down the march of fascism and the nation's war effort, affirming the need to remedy this situation immediately. Both because "halting the revolutionary process because of the war could mean suppressing it only to unleash it tomorrow in tumultuous forms

In this context, the problems of the New Order had systematically been given relatively little attention, unless—but we will return to this shortly— they were viewed from a moral rather than a political, economic, or institutional perspective, and unless the prospect of the postwar order served to reinforce the concept that the distinctive feature of the ongoing conflict was its character as a "war of the poor against the selfishness of the rich" and, therefore, as a "revolution in progress" 'to overthrow the pre-established capitalist interests that thrive everywhere' and the bourgeois selfishness 'of any social class'. Interest in these issues remained generally limited (among the few exceptions, Il Campano is worth mentioning) to relatively small groups with a certain technical background (especially in economics and law) who were part of official political and cultural circles and institutions, in particular

and dangerous," both "either you are a revolutionary or you are a conservative." Hence the conclusion: "We feel the need to because freeing ourselves guard against the dangers of indulgence. from flaws and

The ruling class of yesterday, both the real and the camouflaged, must be gradually replaced by today's ruling cadres. Replaced not only physically but also in its theories and classist mentality, in its methods and institutions.

Let us make the Party more technical; let us prepare men for all kinds of leadership that the life of a people requires. demands.

At the same time, let us not hesitate to speak and write the truth, banishing from our style all manner of pretense . Revolutionary deeds are needed. Because words inspire faith, but only deeds confirm and perpetuate it. And the people stick to the facts and pay attention to the substance of things. They believe in what they see.

Ravasio's article was commented on (*Unfortunately, that's how it is*) the following day by "Il regime fascista" in bittersweet terms. The comment, undoubtedly written by Farinacci, was on the one hand approving, on the other hand reminiscent of Cassandra's revenge, and finally reduced the meaning of Ravasio's speech to the need, in order to win the war, to apply "totally" the laws "wanted by the Regime," giving examples of those relating to race. Finally, on the question of replacing the ruling class, the comment was much more cautious than certain invectives and demands by Farinacci in those years might suggest (in practice, it merely repeated the demand for a "qualitative" party, without worrying about numbers, "which have never counted for anything in history") and revealed his concern that an effective "selection" of the "ruling class" would involve not only former opponents and "grey" figures, but also the old fascism, revolutionary in words but bourgeois and conservative in deeds.

" Twenty years in arms" published (under the full-page headline *Finally!*) both Ravasio's article (on the right) and Farinacci's, along with its own commentary: "Having denounced and acknowledged the possible serious consequences of our culpable indulgence, we must not now allow this voice of absolute truth to be lost in a desert of useless words, the same voice that we must not hesitate to speak or write when it is necessary—as it is today—to clear the way for our Revolution.

The slowdown suffered by the March must not last a day longer. The recovery must be swift and overwhelming; whatever the cost, let those who must fall fall, let protective armor and untouchable cliques be blown up: it doesn't matter. The Revolution demands it: it must not mark time for this. "Either you are a revolutionary or you are a conservative." "Revolutionary action is needed"...

We must act today, act calmly and unyieldingly, so that no more filth lurks in the shadow of the banners.

We must detach the Revolution from the sluggish convoy of the "greys" and the Jewish-Aryan filth that is in league with them.

We who remain must invoke and claim the right and sacrosanct duty to clean up and reorganize our House if we do not want to hear the bitter and justified reproach of those who will return victorious from the battlefields.

It would be unworthy of us to wait for their help to do so.

And never before has the time to act been more propitious and imperatively imperative for victory.

¹ See, for example, G. BARBERO, *Appunti per la polemica antiborghese* cit., November 1940 and February 1941; c. MATTIGLI, *La nostra rivoluzione*, in "Il campanaccio," April 30, 1943.

in the CNF, and were sometimes motivated more by personal ambition than by ethical or political considerations. When it comes to racism, the issue is somewhat more complex. Apart from a certain number of careerists or conformists, anti-Semitic and racial policies did not find widespread support among young people from the outset, and this support gradually diminished, to the point of causing concern among those who constituted the hardline wing of fascism in this area, such as Evola and Landra. Only a part of fascist youth had embraced racism, but often (as was already the case in 1938-39) in a very particular sense: as an aspect of the polemic against the bourgeoisie - 'pietistic' and 'pro-Jewish' - and above all as a *cultural* moment of support for their own criticism of Italian culture and fascist culture itself, and their search for new spiritual values (since, symptomatically, the racism of young fascists was almost always 'spiritualist' and not 'racial'). and ^{fascist} culture itself, and their search for new *spiritual values* (symptomatically, the racism of young fascists was almost always 'spiritualist' rather than biological, and often included more or less explicit polemics against Nazi racism) on which to base 'true ^{revolutionary} fascism'.

Because, and this brings us to the crux of the matter, for young fascists, or those who considered themselves as such and thought and acted in the name of fascism, the war was above all an internal, moral problem, a way of resolving the intimate contradiction between their disappointment with the reality of historical and current fascism and their aspirations for renewal and a new fascism (since they did not believe in other solutions, considering them, like other young Europeans educated in the particular psychological and cultural atmosphere of the 1930s, to be more or less outdated, failed, and inadequate for the times and their aspirations for a new moral and social order) capable of giving life to a new reality that they themselves could not concretely define except in the sense that it should be different, better, and more just than the existing one. This was an internal problem that they had to live with and resolve individually or, at most, among themselves, and which united them despite all their differences in cultural and family background and even in matters of religious faith. This, among other things, explains the unfounded

The truth of the statement—generally self-justifying, sometimes accusatory—that in the postwar period (apparently similar statements were also made during ^{the war} years, but the spirit behind them was different) often recurred in the writings of these young people: we did not have, we did not find teachers who could help us clarify our ideas and find the right path. For, as is also evident from a lucid note by G. Pintor preserved in his diary ("the impossibility of having teachers is one of the essential conditions of our youth and perhaps proof of its revolutionary nature"), these young people did not seek teachers and indeed rejected them, because they considered their respective generations to be uncommunicative and their principles to be "uniquely" theirs, and they considered it their task, their mission, to live them out in all consistency ("first and foremost, therefore, we will be ourselves"), contrary to what their fathers had done, and to realize them against anyone. So much so that their political and social radicalism, their revolutionary conception of war, and the expectations they placed in it often took on tones in the words used to express them that it would be wrong to consider rhetorical, mystifying, or propagandistic, since they corresponded well to the search for moral consistency and social justice that they often experienced in a mystical, utopian, palingenetic. This passage from "Fascist Rome" is typical:

With the victory of our ideal, all that is old will disappear, customs will be renewed, religion will be purified and strengthened in the consciences of men, which bourgeois decadence is rotting away.

Even more typical is this other passage from Giuseppe ^{Berto's} diary, which shows how even those who did not allow themselves to be carried away by mysticism and utopianism were led to see everything from an essentially moral and at the same time generational perspective:

There are two factors that have prompted me to seek, with some insistence, to go to war. The first is that I feel responsible for this war to the right extent, that is, to the extent that every Italian who has the capacity to understand and to will is responsible. If fascism and war were not wanted, it was necessary to think about it beforehand. Now we are all more or less responsible for it, and to stand by and watch events unfold is the most cowardly thing one can do. Since the war broke out, and

As long as it lasts, the identification of fascism with Italy is not up for debate. The second factor stems from the consideration that things are not going well in Italy and that, after victory, a remedy will have to be found, even if it means another revolution. Having participated with honor in this war will constitute a good reason to start a revolution, and I want to be among those who do so.

Various criticisms can be levelled at the young fascists of the war years; in particular, that they often sinned through naivety or excessive intellectualism, which sometimes took on the character of true exhibitionism, and of being motivated, not infrequently, by more or less conscious careerism. However, it is difficult to deny the good faith of the majority of them and the ethical basis of the motivations for their revolutionism and, therefore, their conviction that they were fighting for a just cause. Similarly, it is wrong to consider their recurring and explicit criticism of the regime as manifestations of a rebellion inevitably destined to lead to an open break with it and a transition to anti-fascism. This is contradicted, among other things, by the extent of youth volunteering (to which we will return shortly), the behavior of the majority of those who were taken prisoner by the Allies (and who refused any form of cooperation), and, finally, their political outlets after September 8, when most opted for the Italian Social Republic or for the action parties, especially the Communist Party, which now seemed to them to be the most congenial: because they were not responsible for the failure of the ruling class of the first quarter of the century and more hostile to it and its continued existence than the others. That is, the parties that now seemed most congenial to them: because they were not responsible for the failure of the ruling class of the first quarter of the century and more hostile to it and its continued hold on power even after the end of fascism; because of the moral and moralizing commitment that animated them and made them active forces and therefore considered most capable of bringing about the radical moral, social, and political transformation that they had wanted and believed they could achieve through *revolutionary war and their new fascism*. Only by focusing on this particular psychological reality and the spiritual mechanism that determined and moved it

¹ On prisoners in general, see F. CONTI, *I Italian prisoners of war (1940-1945)*, Bologna 1986, *passim*.

² Among the characteristic aspects of this attitude, it is worth noting the limited impact that the theorization and incitement of "hatred of the enemy" (placed, so to speak, by Mussolini on the agenda of the Italian people in his speech on February 23, 1941, at the Teatro Adriano) had on young fascists and the "mystique of war." This was also true in the last few months before July 25, when there was a certain flourishing of positions in favor of "total war" and (in more or less explicit polemics with the attitude of the Church) its morality. At the heart of these positions, most people focused not on "hatred of the enemy" but on the impossibility of separating the national from the universal in a conflict of such magnitude and epochal significance as the one in progress. "The current war," wrote E. GIUDICI, *Universality and Nationality of Wars*, in *Libro e moschetto*, April 17, 1943, "is both a universal and a national war, in which the values and fate of the world are decided through our Italian conscience. The struggle is certainly between two centuries and two ideas, but precisely because it is a struggle between peoples, because it is peoples who implement and represent ideas. Great conflicts—great because they are universal—always present themselves as phenomena affecting the being and will of peoples, that is, the being and will of their national consciousness. Anyone who today thinks of the coexistence of national and universal values, separate from each other, is on the wrong track...: that is, as already on the occasion of

One can understand a series of issues of decisive importance in order to effectively comprehend both the attitude of young fascists (the Guf, but also others, a few years older, who held positions in the PNF, in the unions, in the party press, etc.) towards war and fascism, and that of the regime and Mussolini towards them, and, furthermore, the nature of their alleged rebellion and the differences between their attitude and that of intellectuals in the true sense of the word, even many of those who were only a few years older than them in terms of age.

After what we have said about *revolutionary war* and the *new fascism*, we believe that the importance attributed by most authors who have dealt with the final period of the fascist regime to the youth "rebellion" should be drastically reduced and dated more precisely.

In the early years of the war, dissent among young fascists (born between 1920 and 1924) was practically non-existent. This was true both for those active in youth organizations, trade unions, and political parties, and for those who were combatants. With regard to the latter, it should be noted that their subsequent testimonies and, where preserved, their contemporary writings (especially diaries and letters to family and friends) document a more exacerbated and critical state of mind, the result of direct experience made up of sacrifices, pain, and death, than that of the former, the criticisms they expressed (as well as those of many young officers and non-commissioned officers a few years older and less influenced by the particular atmosphere of the Guf) almost never questioned fascism as such and its identification with the homeland, even when they took on the character and tone of real re-

of the 1915-18 war had been made by Amendola and Prezzolini - the moral significance of war as "test" of the maturity of peoples and nations. See, for example, P. PIOVANI, *Moralità della guerra totale* cit., in which we read: "If the fate of an entire people depends on war, it is right and moral that the whole people should be committed without convenient distinctions between individuals in gray-green and individuals in civilian clothes...; the factor of *resistance* implies a moral essence that goes beyond the limits of the purely military to enter the realm of spiritual forces... War is a test from which nations emerge either failed or promoted, and therefore it is a human event, a domain of free will that can be explained historically... Total war, therefore, has its own ethics that should also be understood by those who are 'neutral' in form and substance. It was not hatred of the enemy, but moral strength and awareness that had to lead to struggle and resistance to the bitter end. Nor did this position manifest itself only in the last few months, when one might think that it was dictated by the need to convince everyone to resist and to counter—without explicitly addressing it head-on—the increasingly widespread belief among Catholics that it was now necessary to end the war. Significant in this regard (and the examples could be multiplied) is the controversy between 'Pattuglia' (A. MARZOTTO, *Gli Italiani e la guerra*, May 1942, p. 5) and 'Critica fascista' (G. MAGGIORE, *Odiare il nemico*, 1^o March 1942, pp. 133 ff.). To Maggiore, who had defined hatred as "the fuel that feeds the combativeness of armies and the resistance of the home front" (while "any sense of understanding, consideration, or pity towards the enemy cools the competitive spirit of peoples and paves the way for defeat"), Marzotto replied curtly that "hatred does not arise in anyone's soul simply because it is commanded or recommended." "Hatred is a consequence of a given consciousness, a given conviction, and in itself it is sterile; I would go so far as to say it is petty. What truly fuels a people at war and a combatant is this consciousness, this conviction. Consciousness of what? Of fighting for justice, against the abuses of the enemy; of being a people 'superior' to the enemy; superior in civilization and therefore, above all, superior in their sense of

investigations against the political and military hierarchies of the regime and their direct and indirect, immediate and "historical" responsibilities, primarily that of not having given ^{Italians} a true moral conscience, despite always talking about it. Apart from the tone, the criticisms that young combatants levelled at the regime and fascism, at least in the early years of the war, were not substantially different (just as the psychological and moral background from which they drew their inspiration was not different) from those of other young fascists.

Particularly widespread was the desire for a

return to a pure, heroic, and unadorned fascism. The fascism of the black shirts of the Romagna peasants. That of the battles with the Oltretorrente. A scatological fascism. A party, not yet a regime. Aristocracy, driving force. And in that and for that we have returned to believe and for that we are ready to leave, because on our return, it will be that which will be restored to honor and translate the motto "the revolution ^{continues}" into the current of history

And with it, once the war is over, a revolution that almost everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, felt was necessary and were convinced, like Giuseppe ^{Berto}, that with their contribution, fascism could achieve:

First of all, it will be a revolution within fascism and not against fascism.

We are convinced that the theory of fascism contains the moral, social, and economic principles necessary for the civil coexistence of a people and of peoples among themselves, and that the necessary limitation of freedom, much less than at present, is compensated for by a guarantee of order and justice. Unfortunately, as we all realize, the theory is poorly applied: but this does not mean that we need to change the regime, but rather make the one we already have more efficient. In essence, it is simply a matter of eliminating stupidity and corruption, granting greater political freedom because an honest government cannot be afraid of opposition, and above all, giving real dynamic value to the fascist motto "go to the people." We are totally determined to do this, and if we had to fight Mussolini himself to achieve it, we would fight him.

In short, in the early years of the war, what has been defined, too simplistically and, at times, self-servingly (and sometimes establishing trop-

It is easy to draw parallels with the attitude of certain sectors of the intellectual world¹), but "fronda" was only a criticism of fascism that was entirely internal to fascism itself: not of fascism as such, but of its exercise of power, its institutions, its "bureaucratic wheeling and dealing" ("the men of bureaucratic or other kinds of corruption must disappear," wrote Vent'anni in armi on February 28, 1942), corruption, the impossibility of exercising true constructive criticism ("the Regime," wrote F. Carbonetti in Il Lambello on February 25, 1942, "needs constructive but genuine criticism, conscious but effective discussion, in order to strengthen its cadres, select its hierarchies, and ensure the honesty and goodness of its administration"), the *interrupted* nature of the revolution it had undertaken. This criticism was entirely internal to the system and had nothing that would justify calling it anti-fascist, even *in embryo*, and its underlying tone was largely generational in nature. So much so that R. Roversi even stated that the so-called "rebellion" was above all "the existential irritation that accompanies the passing of time and the changing of generations." This existential irritation was often combined with dissatisfaction with the reality of fascism, but either did not go beyond the search for the causes of this reality or, if it did, took the form of a thorough criticism of the previous generation, towards their fathers who had not realized true fascism and towards whom many young people felt a sort of irritation, resentment for their claim that they should be content with the "revealed truth" transmitted to them and, therefore, should not presume to discuss and develop it. Significant (albeit exaggerated by the author's literary hypersensitivity) in this regard is the position of P. P. Pasolini, as expressed in an article he wrote in November 1942 which, although mainly literary in nature, clearly reveals the political and social implications of this state of mind. In it, the future author of *Ragazzi di vita* wrote:

Hard work, extreme self-awareness, individual and collective inner turmoil, and painful critical sensitivity will be the attributes of our new enthusiasm, since, I repeat, both in the political, economic, and social spheres, and in the cultural sphere, it happens...

We must immediately embark on a rediscovery, continuing along this path not mechanically, but with intense and lucid analysis, which will distinguish, within the legacy entrusted to us—in the new sentiment of existence—what is truly new and what is remnant, leftover, or insincere. In short, our generation will remain fixed in history with an extremely serious face, because, already placed, in comparison with our fathers — a n d through their teaching—on a higher plane than that from which they began as young men, we find ourselves responsible before a revealed truth.

Except for significant cases (especially for the personal circumstances of those involved), but quantitatively negligible, it was only in the last few months of 1942 and the first few months of 1943, with the Allied landing in French North Africa, Stalingrad, and the tragedy of the Armir, that one can begin to speak of a ^{youth} rebellion. But even this dating means relatively little on its own: the impact of the events mentioned above and the awareness of their weight on the outcome of the conflict, a n d in particular on Italy, were not the same for everyone and, in any case, did not set in motion a single process b u t , on the contrary, determined very different reactions. Among some of the youth, a n d not only those who were strictly fascist, but also among those of bourgeois extraction and even in some limited sectors of the artisan and working classes, there was a reaction of numb and passive acceptance of the inevitable. As E. Forcella wrote:

We didn't even consider the issue of anti-fascism; we did consider military defeat, but curiously, the prospect of defeat did not prompt us to question the political consequences it would entail.

In another part, a process of detachment from fascism began, which, however, only partially and sometimes only due to extra-political circumstances (friendships and personal esteem with more or less anti-fascist peers often played an important role) oriented itself towards anti-fascism and, in general, took the form of a sort of *willingness*, which would only materialize after July 25 (in some cases even in the hours immediately following the news of Mussolini's arrest, to the extent that some of them were suspected of opportunism) and above all do-

After September 1. Elsewhere, however, the reaction to the looming threat of invasion and defeat was marked by more traditional patriotism and, even more so, by a sense of duty. At a time like that, what mattered most was to "have a clear conscience," to do one's duty to the fullest and to bear witness to personal consistency. This was all the more true for those who had not completely lost hope of a difficult but not impossible reversal of the military situation. Characteristic in this regard is another article by Pasolini (*Ra-gionamento sul dolore civile*) in *Il Setaccio* in December 1942, which is difficult not to consider a sort of continuation of the one mentioned above from the previous month. In it, after making explicit reference to the 'recent conditions of the time' and the 'events of the war' and making clear his rejection of any 'sense of adventure, epic or rhetorical progress, which sounds bitter to our ears', the author wrote:

History deserves it. The reward is directly proportional to the suffering of desire. The joy of those who have hoped most desperately will be greater. These are the terms of civil pain, and its ends. More than the lives offered—a nameless sacrifice, repeated hundreds of times every day, the cruelest of duties, the most painful of means — what will count before history is the possibility of love that the homeland will have obtained from men. And that is why I ardently appeal to those who can understand me, that they may suffer from love for the too many whom nature and education have not made capable of this purest necessity. The homeland is those who love it: and in this thought, faith does not blind me.

This reaction was often accompanied by a deep resentment, a harsh condemnation of those considered responsible for the abyss into which Italy was about to plunge. For those who, aware of defeat and the sense of death—both physical and ideal—were finally beginning to understand the fallacy of past revolutionary illusions and the "moral reasons" that had fueled them and translated them into action, fascism and Mussolini; for those who did not want to resign themselves to the idea of defeat, who still believed that a supreme effort by the whole country and the help of the Germans would turn the military situation around, or who could not give up the idea that their ethics were the only ones worth living and fighting for, the blame lay with the infinite range of all those who had betrayed, sabotaged, ignored the war, speculated on it, hindered and thwarted their efforts to mobilize the "living energies" around Mussolini and a finally revolutionary fascism.

Limiting our discussion for the moment to the period prior to

crisis at the end of 1942 - beginning of 1943, it should also be said that the idea of the existence of a rebellion among young people, if not an opposition more or less manipulated by anti-fascism, was also supported (in addition to some ^{specific} episodes) the deafness and incomprehension, in some cases, and the explicit hostility, in others, of large sectors of the old fascism and the regime. Entrenched as they were in defense of their privileges and power, and opposed to any alteration of both the political and social order on which these were based and the image that Italians had of fascism, they considered the attitude, criticisms, and demands of young people, at best, inappropriate and, not infrequently, a real danger, and as time went by, they hid it less and less. Thus, while in 1940, 1941, and to some extent still in 1942, they generally limited themselves to a few *paternal* admonitions and showed themselves willing to engage in discussion, and in some cases tried to exploit certain criticisms and demands made by young people, that is, to silence or at least moderate the voices that caused the most scandal and difficulty by incorporating them into the party machine, the structures of popular culture, and official newspapers and magazines, already in 1942 and 1943, the initial flexibility was accompanied and gradually replaced by a tougher and more intransigent attitude.

(some youth magazines were forced to cease publication, some were suppressed *outright*, some of the most ardent young fascists were reprimanded and even confined)¹, which, combined with the military crisis and its impact on the attitude of young people, ended up having the opposite effect, contributing to the emergence of a rebellion that had been virtually non-existent until then, but which had been talked about for some time because it was first mentioned by those fascists who rejected the *new fascism* of the young and denied the criticisms and accusations that the latter levelled at them, at their management of the party and the regime, and at their understanding of fascism and its future. This included not only former supporters who had converted to fascism in the past and those who, having specific responsibilities in government or the party, were concerned about the repercussions that the young people's attitude could have on the country but also the intransigent and a large part of the old fascists, who saw in it the negation of their fascism and a threat to their positions of power, and even the Bottai supporters, who shared some of the young people's criticisms and demands and, at first, had tried to "ride the tiger," directing and exploiting it

As regards Farinacci's position (which was predictable in many respects and which we have already mentioned), useful information is provided by U. Indrìo's recent reconstruction in his memoirs of the last bitter clash that the Cremona leader had in December 1942 with "Roma fascista," then edited by Indrìo himself. The occasion for the clash was an article by E. Scalfari on the problem of the PNF, its crisis, Vidussoni's attempts to remedy it, the obstacles that stood in the way, etc. to which Farinacci replied with an angry letter stating that "Roma fasci-

sta", after a series of consultations with the federal representative in Rome, Colesanti, and between Colesanti and Vidussoni, who in turn made it the subject of a "note for the Duce"¹, which he did not publish, but which caused upheaval among the party leadership and contributed to further increasing the hostility of the intransigents towards Vidussoni (who was soon replaced by Scorza) and led the latter to issue a "peremptory order" to the press to stop "any discussion of the so-called youth problem, which lends itself, in good faith or, worse, in bad faith, to creating absolutely intolerable divisions and rifts within the fascist organization." So, all in all, although unknown to the public, Farinacci's response achieved the result that the leader of the hardliners had set out to achieve, since it is clear that the ban on discussing the youth problem also ended up being a clear warning to young fascists not to create difficulties for the regime, and anticipated the exhortation to *keep a close watch on* young people and the attack on extreme youthism that derided those over thirty as "outdated," which Mussolini would make on March 11, 1943, to the ^{PNF} leadership.

On June 7, 1941, *Il popolo di Lombardia* wrote, with veiled sarcasm: "It is very easy, when you are very young, to be moral individuals; the difficult thing is to remain so." In his letter-article to *Roma fascista*, Farinacci was much harsher and more threatening. Taking his cue from Scalfari's statement that in order to overcome the crisis, the party had to fight both "the resistance of men who have attained positions and spiritual situations and who weigh on the continuous process of revolution with the stagnant spirit of their conservative attitudes" and the climate they have created, and practically calling into question, at the end of his letter-article, Vidussoni and, therefore, ultimately Mussolini himself, Farinacci wrote:

This is not the first time, dear comrades, that we have been confronted with statements of this kind, now in this newspaper, now in that youth newspaper. But in this way, witty articles continue to be printed and facile criticism continues to be made, without saying anything concrete or proposing any practical ideas. On the contrary, it gives the impression that they want to establish an alibi by hurling generic accusations against anonymous people.

And so the question arises: do we want to return to the old Fascism, that is, to our own and its original order, or do we want to establish a new fascist spirit with programs that are clear and understandable to all? We must explain ourselves once and for all, otherwise we will be engaging in idle talk in the same way as the demo-socialists of distant memory did.

The editors must have hoped so, if from the very first issue F. M. Paces (one of the most influential members of the editorial committee) felt the need to intervene to restrain him, and in mid-July the magazine published an article (*Pericolo delle scorciatoie*, "The danger of shortcuts") signed by someone anonymous in which, without referring to the debate itself, criticized the "extreme ease" with which young people pronounced themselves "on the most complex and serious problems" and the "unfortunate tendency" of some of them "to improvise on people and events, judgments and expressions" lacking "any basis." With that, the debate practically languished until October 1, when another, much longer and more explicit editorial abruptly and decisively closed it. Debates, it stated, were justified only "on the objective level of ideas," "insofar as, that is, assuming unity of political faith, they tend to compare opinions for the sake of substantive discussion."

When, on the other hand, criticism takes on a more or less pungent and presumptuous character, in spirit and style, of 'inquisition' or 'political indictment', and even enters the realm of loyalty to the flag, then we, in the vast majority of cases, can only refuse to engage in discussion: which would simply be ridiculous.

In the months that followed, there were a few pinpricks (including a defense of state bureaucracy that sparked protests from "Fascist Rome"); then, appointing a *young man* like Vidussoni to the general secretariat of the PNF, a period of apparent greater openness towards the "unscrupulousness" of young people, always accompanied, however, by exhortations and warnings to beware "of preconceived opposition as well as premature flattery" and to "resolve the eternal controversy between young and old in a constructive manner"; finally, after a new period of silence, an ambiguous personal statement by Bottai appeared with the publication, on July 15, of the speech he had given about twenty days earlier in Florence on the occasion of the "cultural events of European youth." It was an extremely rhetorical speech ("only a vast concentration of young people of good will, bearing the marks of moral character, can save the world; ... a new world, a new Europe is about to be born; their design is in the hearts of new men, of young people; ... the

pp. 180 ff., May 15 (CRITICA FASCISTA, M. Sterpa, R. Lodoli), pp. 210 ff., June 1 (B. Giovendale),

pp. 228 ff., June 15 (B. Romani), pp. 244 ff., July 1 (P. Succi), pp. 261 ff., July 15 (anyone),

p. 279, September 1 (E. Capaldo), pp. 324 ff., October 1 (G. A. Longo and an anonymous editorial), pp. 352 ff.

¹ See especially ZINCONE, *Dopo questa guerra*, in Critica fascista, March 1, 1942, pp. 131 ff.; D. VANELLI, *Superamento e risultato di una polemica*, ibid., April 1, 1942, p. 156; M. MORANDI, *Senza sottintesi*, ibid., May 15, 1942, pp. 190 ff.

youth in Fascism and National Socialism is Tasse dell'Asse...") in which there was no mention of the problems and prospects of young people and whose only possible interpretation is a generic call for a third way corporatism in which nothing remained of the spiritual suggestions of *the Revolutionary War*.

Such a bland speech cannot be explained solely by the formality of the occasion and Bottai's typical caution: in our opinion, the real explanation lies rather in the concerns aroused in him by the unrest, criticism, and calls for renewal that were spreading almost everywhere at that time ("I am beginning to notice signs of unrest in the nation, which would like to see the Party embark on a path of more intense, newer, more revolutionary achievements," Ravasio wrote in his diary[^], particularly among younger people towards the "generation" before them, involving even those who were already quite prominent and culturally and professionally qualified.

As we have seen, there had been precedents in this regard in the previous two years; however, the phenomenon had never reached the scale it was now assuming and had remained mainly confined to elements of little or no significance (in terms of cultural background, positions held, family affiliation), chronic troublemakers who, in order to express their criticisms and proposals, had had to sneak into the most prominent youth press or settle for almost unknown magazines that enjoyed no credibility, whereas now they were finding hospitality even in authoritative publications, were expressed by young people who were not only well educated but who often came from important families of the fascist establishment (typical cases being Vito Panunzio and Guido Carli) and were acquiring, directly or indirectly, ever greater weight and influence not only in youth press outlets in the strict sense, but also in party and trade union publications, over which the former had extended their influence. This explains how the phenomenon had begun to alarm more than one hierarchy and to arouse controversy between those who judged it more or less positively and those who, on the contrary, considered it dangerous, between those who wanted to crush it by resorting to the most drastic means (such as Pavolini) and those who (such as Ravasio and, to some extent, Vidussoni) thought it better to support, at least in part, the demands for renewal that were emerging. On some aspects of this new situation, Musso himself

Lini would have drawn the attention of the national leadership of the PNF a month later, not hiding a certain concern. According to the testimony preserved in Bottai's diary—the only one we know of—after several quotes from Gufi newspapers in which *abstract* issues were discussed more than the war, *and* criticism of the regime and the party was voiced, Mussolini urged the party to exercise greater control over young university students.

Upon closer examination, Bottai noted, it turns out that it is often "established men" and not young people who write in youth newspapers; and young people who write during wartime generally do not have his sympathy... And then, they talk about what Fascism has done and is: a movement "with its own doctrine and its own individuality."

Given this situation, it is understandable that Bottai (who, moreover, aspired to become secretary general of ^{the party}) did not want to take a clear stance, just as it cannot be ruled out that the fact that he had to speak in the presence of official representatives of the "European youth," a n d in particular the National Socialist youth, who were far from willing to listen to speeches that did not agree with their own views. However, in our opinion, this explanation is not sufficient either. The real issue is another. Until the young fascists had developed a certain type of criticism of the regime and, albeit with many contradictions, had only marginally questioned the character and basic corporate structure that was supposed to distinguish the new society that would emerge from *the revolutionary war*, Bottai—while distancing himself from those positions that could have exposed him to the risk of unwanted involvement—was able to maintain an "open" and, all things considered, "available" attitude toward them. This was all the more so because his decades-long position on *youth politics* authorized him to do so *and*, at the same time, his interest in the matter prompted him to do so.

He deeply regrets the Party's disappointment, as he was not warned in advance. He defends himself and declares first of all that he has nothing against the Party, that the Party's press has never been so good; that the youth press does indeed go too far, but that this is no reason to create a rift between him and the Party; that he is willing to go to Vidussoni and repeat this to him personally.

3 August These orders I occasionally receive regarding warnings, suspensions of GUF newspapers, etc., do not persuade me at all; in fact, I either tone down the measures ordered or postpone their execution. I feel that journalists are often right; that if I were in their place, I would write the same things. Repression o r suppression is too late today. A n d then, when things are not going well, it is useless to try to make people believe the opposite. Reality is stronger than any propaganda. This is another reason why I a m a s k i n g Vidussoni once again to take me t o Palazzo Venezia because I want to talk about it in person. Pavolini insists on repeating to me that it is not he who submits t h e incriminating texts to the Duce, but that the Duce himself discovers them o r receives them from his officials a n d is angered by what he reads, and demands sanctions.

if politicians presented themselves as their most attentive and helpful interlocutors in a party where the vast majority of leaders rejected or resented their criticism and their proposals for the future. When criticism of the trade union and corporate system (arising from the poor functioning of corporate institutions and the belief, depending on the case, that it was necessary to involve workers in the war effort by making them participate in the political and social activities of the state, or that national economic life should be more strictly regulated by resorting to effective planning from above) became more explicit and radical, tendencies emerged that from above), these criticisms became more explicit and radical, and tendencies emerged that a) questioned the entire system, judging it to be a theoretical abstraction or now obsolete, a survival - if not the codification - of the class dualism of Marxist memory that it had intended to overcome; b) supported the need to reevaluate the union, ensuring self-government for the categories or reconstituting it on a unitary basis and bringing it out of the politically secondary position in which it had 'come to find itself, in the authoritarian state, in front of the party'; and these trends were emerging from the youth sphere, where they had generally originated, finding followers (whether convinced or critical, it mattered little), being discussed and even featured in official magazines (such as *Civiltà fascista*) and authoritative ones (such as *Rivista italiana di scienze economiche*, *Economia nuova*, and *Augustea*) and threatened to make inroads even among some of the most authoritative and loyal editors of *Critica fascista*. For Bottai, any possibility of "openness" and "availability" automatically fell away. He could highlight some particular aspects of the controversy surrounding them, more or less in line with his conception of corporatism, and perhaps try to argue that many of these criticisms could

"find acceptance and a complete solution *within* the system outlined by the laws of 1920 and the 'Charter' of 1927" and even claim that this was "surpassable," but he could neither accept the negative judgment that was in fact given of "his" corporatism nor admit that the Charter of Labor had already reached the stage of "surpassability." He could not do so because, as is usually the case with pure theorists, he could not resign himself to the idea that his construction had only abstract validity, because it would have been tantamount to an admission of failure that would inevitably have extended to his figure as an intellectual and politician, and, finally, because he had to realize that, in the logic of "you cannot win the war unless you win the revolution at the same time," fascism would inevitably lead to a totalitarianism similar to either Nazism or communism and, he thought, in the postwar period, to a sort of collectivism regulated by the initiative of large entrepreneurs. All this was even more true given that a) - albeit with very different intentions - intellectuals who were not without a certain influence in the party, particularly in some of the more intransigent and pro-German sectors (such as Costamagna) or who were looked up to by numerous lively and committed youth groups (such as Pellizzi, whose position at that time was probably felt by them to be the most morally and politically akin to their own; and Spirito); b) that criticism of

The corporatism expressed by these youth groups became increasingly radicalized and shifted from the cultural, technical, and ethical spheres to the political sphere *tout court*, to the point of accusing those who did not want to eliminate it but only to reform its institutions thus turning it into an effectively revolutionary instrument on a social level, of being not fascists, but reactionaries and of moving "in a fully demoliberal" and social-reformist direction: c) that the 'generation' of young people who had been at the forefront until then was being joined by another, even younger generation, which had actually formed more in the climate of the immediate pre-war period and the war (and, therefore, strongly influenced by the particular state of mind of the bourgeoisie during this period) than in the 1930s, when the previous generation had been formed and whose "situations" and "spiritual concerns" were unclear, making it difficult to predict their future orientations:

At this point, having highlighted the most characteristic aspects of the attitude

For the period following the *Revolutionary War*, the most enlightening writing is certainly an essay (or draft speech or note intended for some exponent of fascism, perhaps C. Pellizzi) of sixteen pages written in mid-1943 and remaining unpublished in the *Archives of the U. Spirito Foundation*. In it, the philosopher—perhaps thinking of an initiative that would involve Italian men of culture and "men of culture who were friends, enemies, and neutral" (it is not clear whether this also included Germans and Soviets or whether the initiative, after Spirito had lost hope in a new "political-social" agreement between Germany and the USSR, was essentially directed against the latter) - focused in particular on a problem that was deeply felt by fascist youth and which he defined as: "two needs of current political life: *recognition of the individual's personality and an effective solution to the social problem*." Democracies and Bolshevism had, in his view, understood only one of these two needs "and therefore had not seriously understood either of them." Fascism, on the other hand, had understood that "the truly revolutionary problem was that of the synthesis of liberalism and socialism" and, therefore, the need not to neglect the two aforementioned needs. However, it was only at the beginning of its journey.

"and it will have to take many more steps before its ideal can be said to be purified of the dross that continually compromises it." Fascism "knows its faults, its shortcomings, the dangers that threaten it...; it knows the speculators on the right and left, the profiteers, the forces that make its path arduous or ambiguous; above all, it knows the active and passive resistance, internal and external, that continually muddies, alters, weakens, and mortifies it." Therefore, it claimed for itself "the right and duty" to purify itself and denounced "the current Catos" as the ones truly responsible for the negative aspects of fascism." First and foremost, the bourgeoisie, which refused to "take note of the freedom to which the proletariat aspires," to "understand the difference between freedom and privilege, between right and arbitrariness," and to "recognize that unifying the classes means unifying the freedom of the classes."

Hence the twofold conclusion reached by Spirito. "Meeting the masses halfway towards freedom does not mean... granting the masses the rights of freedom enjoyed by the bourgeoisie, but rather granting, as a preliminary step and as a prerequisite for all other freedoms, the right to work and equality of starting positions in the struggle of life. This prerequisite implies a whole other series of prerequisites called programmatic economics, economic independence of the nation, restrictions on private initiative, transformation of property rights and, on an international level, redistribution of the world's wealth." Fascist authoritarianism arose above all from the resistance of the national and international bourgeoisie to this prospect and from the "transitorily irreplaceable technical function" that authoritarianism could not fail to have in such a far-reaching revolutionary process. Although in different forms, it had therefore not only characterized "all the new revolutionary regimes, from Bolshevism to Fascism, Nazism, and Falangism," but was "at the gates, and more than at the gates, of the great democracies that until yesterday mocked the political forms of fascism," to which the necessities of wartime and the impossibility of neglecting or leaving the social problem in the background were finally opening their eyes.

¹ See, for example, U. INDRIO, *Tornando ai principia: corporativismo non è democrazia* (*Returning to the basics: corporatism is not democracy*), in "Roma fascista," June 3, 1943.

² Significant traces of concern in this regard can be seen in R. SCODRO, *I giovani e il Regime* (*Young People and the Regime*), in *Critica fascista*, July 1, 1943, pp. 219 ff.

youth, the discussion can finally return to Mussolini, to his position on that "youth problem" which, as we have seen, he—while not ignoring the indifference, malaise, the "symptoms of spiritual unease" present among young people, and not only among those he denied were *true* young people, but also among those who were, or at least considered themselves to be, true and genuine fascists.

To understand this position, it is necessary to bear in mind various facts.

Mussolini was not at all surprised that there were large pockets of "misfits" and opportunists among young people from middle-class backgrounds. What mattered to him was that these pockets were smaller than those found among the middle class as a whole and much smaller than those found among intellectuals. With regard to the latter, which in his eyes was, as has been said, largely characterized by abstraction, an inability to understand reality politically, skepticism, and opportunism typical of the most backward "bourgeois spirit," so much so that he could not wait to be able, once the war was over, to make a clean sweep of the old bourgeois intellectuals and replace them with *true* intellectuals who were the fruit of the fascist 'moral reform' and 'new civilization', the world of youth had long had the great merit of being, on the whole, much more genuine and 'idealistic', politically motivated, driven by moral demands that were anything but "bourgeois," even when they did not translate into explicit anti-bourgeois positions. That being the case, while it was obvious that the 'misguided' and opportunists had to be kept under surveillance (and Mussolini became, as mentioned, even more convinced of this necessity when the 'generation' of very young people came to the fore and there was a significant increase in cases of disinterest in the progress and outcome of the war and even "monkey-see, monkey-do" imitation of Anglo-Saxon fashions), it was also natural that, in the eyes of the "Duce," a whole series of positions, extremisms, and protests from within the regime, which appeared unacceptable and dangerous to other fascists, appeared, except in extreme cases, to be either simple youthful excesses or, all things considered, much more positive than negative: in certain cases to be kept under control, moderated, and better oriented politically, but nothing to be alarmed about, but rather, on the whole, to be pleased about. As is easy to understand, Mussolini must have seen in them, on the one hand, the best proof of the fascist commitment of young people and, on the other, a valuable instrument of political pressure: on the 'amorphous' bourgeoisie, which was becoming increasingly detached and 'unfaithful', and to encourage and increase the confidence of other social classes in fascism and in the new and better future that it would bring them and, at the same time, also in fascism itself, its organizational structures, hierarchies, and leaders.

In the next chapter, we will examine events *within* the regime and, therefore, also within the party. However, in order to provide a clearer picture of Mussolini's position towards young people, it is worth briefly summarizing some aspects relating to the party. The fact that the PNF responded only partially and inadequately to its tasks was viewed increasingly negatively by Italians, even by most of those who believed in the cause and in victory in the war, to the point that it was considered one of the main reasons for discontent, passivity in public spirit, and the decline in the prestige of the regime and of Mussolini himself. Furthermore, its political line, its activities, and the quality of its hierarchies were one of the main reasons for criticism and conflict within *the regime's establishment* and the fascist leadership group.

The "Duce" knew this very well and had known it for some time. Starace's dismissal in November 1939 had not solved anything; in a certain sense, it could be said that it had aggravated the situation, given the total failure of Muti's management. Compared to this, Adelchi Serena's management (November 1940 - December 1941) initially gave the impression of a certain improvement, but it too soon proved inadequate. Mussolini then decided to put all his eggs in one basket, backing a young man, behind whom, however, he himself would stand, and alongside whom he placed as deputy secretary an old fascist whom he knew well and in whom he had complete confidence: Carlo Ravasio. Thus, in December 1941, the much-discussed Vidussoni administration began, destined to be the longest of the war years.

Until Vidussoni was appointed secretary general of the PNF, there had been much talk and writing about the party's problems, but without going beyond an essentially ^{theoretical} sphere or, worse, beyond the struggles and ambitions of the various fascist groups and hierarchies. The only real exception was the youth press, which, while it had the merit of speaking clearly about certain issues, had not managed to bring about a solution to them and had attracted the hostility (whether explicit or concealed, it matters little) of much of *the establishment* and, in particular, of the most influential central and local leaders. So much so that if it had been able to escape more numerous and harsher repressive measures, it was mainly due to the indirect cover given to it by *Gerarchia* which published a number of articles that were not particularly challenging in themselves but which, for the sole fact of

published in the personal magazine of the "Duce," led his opponents to tone down their rhetoric and limit their protests and calls for repressive measures to only the most sensational cases.

Appointed secretary, Vidussoni had initiated a series of measures aimed at morally and quantitatively "selecting" the party, "debureaucratize" it and free it from numerous responsibilities "that exceeded its duties," which absorbed much of its energy to the detriment of its more strictly political activities and prevented it from being "a moral, social, revolutionary body that acts at the forefront of the nation, supervising, controlling, and intervening in all areas of national life," capable of raising and defending, "alongside that of faith," "the banner of honesty." Referring to them, Mussolini had said to the federalists of Veneto and South Tyrol:

Now a new period in the life of the Party has begun. The period of selection. First there was a period in which we opened our doors, indeed we threw them wide open. And it was necessary to do so. It was not a mistake. We had to show that we do not consider ourselves a caste closed off from the life of the nation. However, this has weighed heavily on the Party, with the influx of elements which, either because of their age or for other less commendable reasons, must now be considered a kind of ballast.

We must expel this ballast. And resolutely focus on young people. That is, focus on the new generations. This does not mean that everyone else should be dismissed. No. They are still a reserve of tough, determined people who obey, who are ready to respond when called upon, and who prove it with their actions. But there is the path of generations. And it is an inevitable path. A generation is the passage from one to twenty-five years of age, it is the son of the son. If we were to crystallize, we would create a fracture between these generations. Conversely, we must create a passage, a continuity; there must be no break in continuity. There are young, fresh forces, and there are reserves of men who have fought and are ready to fight.

Now the Party must seek quality rather than quantity. All those who do not share our enthusiasm, those who have sat back, all those who say, "When will Mussolini give us a moment's rest?" (I will never give it to them, by the way), must be sent away. They are now rejects.

We want not only those who physically carry the card: we want those who carry the faith. And not even a faith that has superficial aspects, that is the stammering of formulas. No. A deeply felt faith, that is permeated, blood of our blood, flesh of our flesh. For which we risk our lives and therefore all risks. Faith according to our doctrine and according to our experience. Away with the pacifists, all those who say, "When will it end?", not "how" will it end.

Once, the purge of the Party was carried out under Giuriati's management, in a mechanistic sense: reduce it by ten percent. But a political organization is not a bale of cotton. This time, the purge will be based on the positive or negative qualities of the individual. Even if we lose a million out of the Party's three or four million members, it doesn't matter. It is better that these elements are outside, so that we can look them in the face, than among us, with the discomfort that comes from marching with someone whose heart does not beat in unison with ours.

Not wanting to give the country the image of a party that was too corrupt and bureaucratic, nor to provoke excessive discontent and reactions among its members, Vidussoni—instead of taking the bull by the horns—chose the path of a gradual ("slow but steady") application of the measures decided with Mussolini and focused essentially on a few but tough

"examples," considering them sufficient to rid the party of "profiteers" and "those who have achieved such profit through the springboard of faith" and to "consolidate around its activities the pure climate of integrity, honesty, and righteousness."¹ The results achieved were even more modest than those that could perhaps have been obtained with decisive and uncompromising action and, all in all, counterproductive, both in terms of the country in general and the expectations of Fascist youth.

Once it became *routine*, the application of the measures not only lost its bite, but was also exposed to counter-maneuvers by those hierarchs—also present in the National Directorate of ^{the PNF}—who had had to endure them because the "Duce" had wanted them and who, as time went by, began to work to completely undermine them and thus prevent them from weakening the foundations of their personal power and attributing their failure to Vidussoni. The purge of the party remained largely on paper and, except for a few "examples" (some of which provoked a violent reaction from Farinacci and accusations against Vidussoni of having wanted them for personal grudges and to strike at his opponents), almost only third-rate figures fell under his axe. The introduction of young people into the hierarchy, not wanting it to take on the character of a repudiation of old fascism, was in turn scarce, and it was often the most integrated and willing to compromise in order to advance their careers who benefited from it. As for the youth press, after enjoying a few months of relative freedom of criticism, it found itself more exposed than before to interventions from above, warnings, and attacks. And, what is worse, gradually more

viewed with impatience and suspicion by Mussolini himself; which, on the one hand, gave new impetus to those who had always opposed it, and on the other, encouraged those (such as Pavolini) who did not entirely approve of the "excessive" freedom it enjoyed, partly because of the positions they held, did not want to make any missteps and expose themselves to accusations of excessive condescension. On yet another hand, it weakened the possibilities of intervention by those few (such as Ravasio) who, realizing the state of mind of Fascist youth and the risk that, if opposed, they might find new directions, would have preferred a more flexible course of action. Thus, towards the end of Vidussoni's administration (which, in other areas too, failed to renew the youth policy of his predecessors, continuing, for example, to underestimate the importance of nurturing middle school students in order to make them 'the breeding ground for the Guf' and not leaving the field practically open to the penetration among them of what Mussolini would soon define as the 'monkey-like imitation' of Anglo-Saxon 'fashions'), the hard line of the future secretary general Carlo Scorza prevailed. concluding a report to the editors of fascist newspapers and the heads of the press and propaganda offices of the federations on February 8, 1943, was able to impart to them a code of conduct that would have been unthinkable a few months earlier and which, despite its ambiguity, anticipated his position when, two and a half months later, he would take Vidussoni's place. It stated:

It is essential that the press—especially the university press—be revitalized not only in its negative and destructive criticism, but also in its contribution of ideas, so as to reconnect fascist culture with traditional culture and to present a united front in this area as well.

Although he too spoke of the need to purify the party and make way for young people, one of the first things Scorza would have liked to do, had he had the time, had he become secretary, was to bring the youth press definitively into line and silence critical voices in the name of the need to eliminate, both within the party and in the country, the reasons for di-

that the Guf newspapers abused the freedom of discussion granted to them, reports that in early April 1942 Farnesi considered it necessary for the youth press to be entrusted "to the control of serious and responsible people."

¹ On July 1, 1942, Ravasio, referring to a conversation with another deputy secretary of the NF, Mario Farnesi, about the party's problems, noted in his diary: "Young people are not at all supportive of the regime... Young people want to have their say, which is always at odds with that of their fathers; they should be allowed to speak. In debate, they would measure themselves and, perhaps, become more disciplined. But this is not wanted at the top. Moreover, I have the impression that suppressing them is preparing the ground for the unleashing of the antithesis tomorrow" (see *Report to the Duce*, p. 396).

² ACS, *Private Secretariat of the Duce, Correspondence (1922-1945)*, b. 50, file 242/R, "Aldo Vidussoni," "note for the Duce" dated February 9, 1943.

had they taken on board the demands of young fascists, the final outcome would certainly not have been any different. The crisis, albeit with its own characteristics – as we have said – which differed in more ways than one from those experienced by older generations, had already made a significant impact on young people by the time Scorza became party secretary. Discouraged, embittered, and poisoned by the collapse of their hopes and the failure of their ideals, and by the realization that even in that dramatic situation no one was willing to listen to their voice—not even Mussolini, who in his speech on June 24 would adopt the agenda of the directorate two weeks earlier — the majority of them had either shut themselves away in a state of resigned passivity, were preparing to 'go out with a bang', or were getting ready to 'jump ship'. Others went further: some on their own, but more often thanks to *the ethical mediation* of individual anti-fascists and, above all, of some spontaneous groups of intellectuals who, dissatisfied with the slowness and tactical maneuvers with which the anti-fascist parties were being reconstituted (with which they were generally connected, even if they operated largely independently of them), had already been active for some time and with whom a certain number of young people, including fascists, had come into contact or were coming into contact, changing their ethical-political horizons and opening themselves up to a new assessment (even if, as we have already said, it was often conditioned by their own moralism and revolutionism) of those values of freedom, self-government, and democracy that they had previously rejected and despised as inadequate to sustain a modern society that was more just than the one that had been built on these values. But we will return to this aspect of the crisis of 1942-43 shortly. Before doing so, we would like to dwell for a moment on Mussolini's position, which we have so far reconstructed in only one of its two main aspects.

To believe that the "Duce" had accepted the "routinization" of prov-
The measures adopted by Vidussoni to revitalize the PNF and make it a politically capable instrument of restoring confidence in the regime among Italians, and first and foremost among the most "lively" segment of the population, young people, were solely intended to avoid divisions between the old and new generations of fascists and to give too much credence to Farinacci and the Farinaccians is to be satisfied with a half-explanation, which is not enough to make it complete, even if we consider that Vidussoni's laissez-faire attitude was influenced by his preoccupation with other problems and the particular psychological condition in which, as we shall see, he found himself at that time: in order to reconstruct his position completely, it is necessary to consider another aspect of the problem.

Although he was satisfied because the "enormous mass" of young people were "in order," Mussolini—as we have said—made a substantial distinction between those who were "in order" and the "true young people"; between those who, despite being sincere fascists and bearers of ideas, perspectives, and criticisms of the men and institutions of the regime and Italian society that he often shared, in his eyes, they lacked that little bit of political sense and realism that should have prevented them from raising (and with such force) issues that divided the party, damaged the regime in the eyes of Italians and Germans, and could be exploited by enemy propaganda. And those who, rather than discussing, wanted to fight and did fight. Because at that moment—again, according to Mussolini—the real, the only goal was *to win*; everything else was secondary and had to be measured and calibrated in relation to that goal. And therein lies the ultimate explanation for his position.

A whole series of elements—some of which we have already discussed—must be considered. It is clear that Mussolini ultimately viewed the Gufini and the young people of the Gii differently. In the former, almost all of whom were from middle-class backgrounds, even if they were critical of the mentality, selfishness, and attitude of the bourgeoisie towards war and fascism, he ultimately saw potential or already established intellectuals who, despite their fascism, retained some of the traditional limitations and defects of the intellectual, the "literary", including a tendency towards excessive criticism, rhetoric, writing rather than acting, or fighting with words rather than weapons. This was quite the opposite of the young people of the Gii, who were, not coincidentally, much more socially diverse and mostly belonged to the urban working class, who felt above all the duty to fight. Hence his greater appreciation for the latter rather than the former, which is clearly evident in his identification with the former.

"true young people" in the Bir el Gobi fighters, mostly volunteers from the Gii and organized in the "Young Fascists" battalions of the Militia, and for the others, from the attention with which the press followed them and, while covering them, at least until a certain point, from the attacks of those who would have liked to silence them, by not committing himself to supporting them beyond a certain largely political limit, functional to certain objectives of both a general and contingent nature that were closest to his heart; ready, when he deemed it appropriate, to tighten or allow the brakes to be tightened on them.

Taking the discussion further and attempting to assess the realism or otherwise of Mussolini's distinction between the young people of the Gii and the Guf is far from easy. To a large extent, it would have to be extended to another closely related topic: that of volunteering, which we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This is an issue on which there is a lack of

any scientific study; with scarce documentation that is sometimes difficult to interpret (due to its intersection with other issues that must also be taken into account) and on which, moreover, there is a popular belief, due

a) the overestimation and glorification of volunteerism during the 1915-18 war by both former combatants and interventionists of Risorgimento and democratic descent and by fascism; b) the fact that, being generally of higher social and cultural extraction, the volunteers of the Great War left a rich series of written testimonies, most of which have been published; c) the silence or near silence that still surrounds volunteering in 1940-43; d) the scarcity of available testimonies on it; e) the contribution made to its establishment by scholars of great stature, such as Chabod¹: so that it has been and still is almost unanimously believed that volunteering was much less numerous during the Second World War than during the First, and that this would confirm the fact that the Fascist war was less felt from a national point of view than the 1915-18 war.

However, volunteering is a significant element in the picture we have been painting of both the attitude of young people during the war and Mussolini's attitude towards them, and it is therefore necessary to try to establish whether or not this popular belief corresponds to the truth.

According to the most ^{reliable} data, which rightly considers only a minimal proportion of emigrants who returned to serve in the military in order to avoid the risk of being barred from returning to Italy in the future, the volunteers actually enlisted

a minimal number of emigrants who returned to serve in the military in order to avoid the risk of being barred from returning to Italy in the future, the volunteers actually enlisted in the Army as such and in accordance with ^{Italian} military legislation³ during the Great War numbered just over eight thousand, 8,171 to be precise, including a good number of "irredentists" from Trentino, Giuliani and Dalmatians. There is no data available for the Navy, but various factors suggest that there were only a few hundred volunteers at sea.

Also in 1915-18, the number of those who applied for voluntary enlistment exceeded the number of those who were enlisted; a certain number of applications were in fact rejected or left unanswered by the military authorities: in some cases for political reasons, more often because they involved individuals belonging to classes whose mobilization was imminent, but above all because of the military authorities' deep-rooted hostility towards volunteers. This hostility had its ideological roots far back in time (there were still

echoes of the conflicts and contrasts between the "royalists" and the "Garibaldians"), but it also had technical justifications that the military authorities would invoke again in 1940-43: since it mainly involved young people who were not currently subject to mobilization, volunteering depleted the classes that would gradually be called to arms of some of their best elements, entailed additional, and sometimes unsustainable, costs for training, equipment, and supervision, and introduced politicized and often undisciplined individuals into the military machine, so that it was more harmful than useful (so much so that some military systems, such as the German one, did not provide for it), even if used only for assault units. While taking due account of this attitude on the part of the military authorities, it is a fact that there were far fewer volunteers in 1915-18 than the patriotic hype surrounding them would lead one to believe, nor were they more numerous than in 1940-43.

For the period of participation in World War II, the available figures are few, unofficial, and not always easy to evaluate, both because of the sources that must be used and because most of the young people who enlisted as volunteers preferred the Militia (whose archives have been almost completely destroyed) to the Army and Navy for ideological reasons, and the Militia worked (both under Starace and even more so under Galbiati) to encourage volunteering, in agreement with the party, while the traditional armed forces tried in various ways to discourage it and make it as difficult as possible.

According to the Gii command, even before the declaration of war 'several thousand' young people between the ages of fifteen and nineteen had asked to 'serve their country in arms'. The special issue of the 'Weekly Newsletter of the PNF Press Office' of October 28, 1941, dedicated to "Il Partito per la guerra" (The Party for War), after reporting that up to that point 3,496 young men of the Littorio had fallen in combat and another 5,881 had been wounded (without specifying whether they were volunteers or conscripts), ¹states:

The aspiration of all Italian youth to be ahead of their time and enlist was ardent.

At the start of hostilities on the western front, 24 battalions of young fascists, with a force of about 24,000 men, were grouped together at the disposal of the Armed Forces. During the Greek-Albanian campaign, a large contingent of young people from the GIL (Italian Labor Youth) voluntarily enlisted. With the Black Shirt battalions of the Galbiati Group, 670 young fascists had their baptism of fire, while others joined the Royal Army units or served

¹pp. 73 ff. According to the Army General Staff, as of June 1, 1940, only those born before 1916 and after 1920 could enlist as volunteers.

at the front lines. During the occupation of the territories of the former Yugoslavia, units of young fascists from the federal commands of Trieste, Fiume, and Zara participated in the operations, under the command of their respective leaders and officers. Currently, in North Africa, the "Assault Battalion Group of Young Fascists" of the class of 1922, numbering about 1,800, has reached the front line.

These statements are confirmed in General ^{Armellini's} *War Diary* and in the minutes of the meeting held on June 8, 1940, between Badoglio and the heads of the various branches of the armed forces. The former mentions "a group of 10 or 20 Gii battalions" formed by the party; the latter shows that Starace wanted to bring the volunteers together in special units of the Militia, but that Mussolini had expressed his clear opposition to the formation of special militias to Badoglio. Again according to the PNF Press Office, and again on October 28, 1941, the Guf had submitted "tens of thousands" of applications for voluntary enlistment, "thousands" of which, it seems, had been approved by a special military office set up within the Guf general secretariat. During the same period, 599 Guf members were reported killed and wounded. A year later, a "note for the Duce" by Vidussoni dated October 22, 1942, would thus update the Gufini's participation in the war up to that point: out of 122,383 university fascists, 72,455 were in the armed forces; 1,207 had been killed, 956 wounded, and 1,102 decorated, including 58 with gold medals. In both cases, it remains unclear how many were actually volunteers. Some indication of this can be found in a volume published by the PNF towards the end of Serena's administration. In fact, it states that 20,000 applications for enlistment had been submitted by young university students up to that point, and that to this figure should be added "the 35,000 university students enlisted at the request of the Guf Secretariat with classes from 1915 to 1921, as well as young graduates and diploma holders, enrolled in the Guf up to the age of 28, and already in the army, amounting to about 20,000." The interest in these figures is not only quantitative: they indirectly confirm the veracity of a series of rumors circulating at the time and subsequent statements according to which, as far as the GUF was concerned, a large part of the enlistments were not truly voluntary, but more or less coerced.

tive, "organized" from above with various expedients and taking advantage of particular moments of emotionality: sometimes due to the zeal and desire to stand out of individual Guf secretaries, in some cases to try to combat "university ambushes," i.e., the increase in enrollment to escape military service (from 1939-40 to 1942-43, the university population rose from 85,000 to 168,000), and generally to give the country the image of an enthusiastically warlike youth.

Despite their approximation, based on these elements it is difficult to continue to argue that volunteering—especially among young people—was quantitatively lower in 1940-43 than in 1915-18. On the contrary, it must be said that it would have been even more substantial if it had not once again encountered the underlying hostility of the military leadership, who tried to curb and discourage it (citing, among other things, various technical difficulties in accepting only a small proportion of volunteers' requests to be sent to the theatre of operations¹ despite the fact that in most cases the volunteers, especially the younger ones and those assigned to their own units, performed very well in the field).

A notable feature is the story of the approximately 24,000 young men of the Gii who enlisted at the beginning of hostilities. With them, the GII formed 25 battalions (including one Alpine battalion) which, on October 1, 1940, at the end of a two-month training cycle, were reviewed by Mussolini, after which the Ministry of War (which had made no secret of its hostility to taking on their training and the burden of providing the necessary command cadres) decided that nine would be sent to Albania and the others to the Po and Eastern Armies, only to immediately reverse its decision and, taking advantage of the partial demobilization decided, as already mentioned, at that very time, send almost all of them home and, at the same time, raise the minimum age for recruitment to 18. As a consolation, 2,387 young men born in 1922 were retained and used to form a group of Young Fascist battalions (two units, increased to three in the summer of 1942 and transformed into a regiment, which was supposed to grow into an armored division, but never actually took shape) who were only able to take the oath in June 1941 and were transferred to North Africa.

where he remained until the surrender of the last forces barricaded in Tunisia - towards the end of the following month, only thanks to Mussolini's direct intervention. "It took my personal order," he said on January 14, 1942, to the new commander of the group, who was about to leave for Libya to replace Lieutenant Colonel Tanucci: wounded at Bir el Gobi, "to send them to the front, because others had little confidence in these young men." Something similar happened with the Guf volunteers: their enlistment was accepted by the War Ministry only in mid-December 1940, with the mobilization of the class of 1921, and implemented in the following February, initially giving instructions for them to be grouped together in their own units, then distributing them among various units instead. Thus, in the first year of the war, the volunteers who were actually employed were mainly those immediately recruited at the beginning by the Militia, for example, the so-called Galbiati Group, which participated with honor in operations on the Greek-Albanian front.

This line of conduct was not unique to ^{Badoglio's} administration; even when Cavallero took over the effective leadership of the Supreme Command, things did not really change, apart from a few minor formalities. More diplomatic than his predecessor, he immediately chose to declare himself absolutely unable to train and instruct new recruits (in particular the Gufini who, due to their educational qualifications, could not be used as ordinary soldiers unless they explicitly waived their rights, but had to be enrolled in courses for non-commissioned officers and officer cadets) and to link the issue of volunteers closely to the more general issue of the Militia, its reorganization, and its relationship with the Army, hinting to Serena and Galbiati a series of possibilities - unfeasible or which he was careful not to try to implement - which at first had to restrain the party and the Militia from insisting too much on their demands that the Army review its attitude towards volunteers, value them more highly or give the Militia the means and men to train, organize and employ them on its own. In reality, Cavallero was also of the opinion that it was necessary to "safeguard the recruitment of the army" and, if he could, he would have entrusted the Militia with "only

pre-military and post-military"¹. Subsequently, unable to realistically maintain such a rigid position, Cavallerò had to make some concessions, but by then the issue of volunteers was taking on a different character, both due to the mobilization of the younger classes and the growing unavailability of men and resources to organize new units (a typical example is the failure to transform the *Giovani Fascisti* regiment into a mechanized division), and the urgency and emergence of ever new and more important problems, in the face of which it could not but become secondary. All the more so because Cavallerò's line, first "soft" and then "objective," also prevented Mussolini from insisting too much on the issue of volunteers. More importantly, in the second half of 1941, disappointment and irritation began to grow among young people over the course of the war and the regime's inability to deal decisively with the situation. On the one hand, this led to a significant decrease in the number of volunteers and, on the other, reinforced the conviction among the most motivated, and in particular among the Gufini, that rather than going to the front and submitting to 'incompetent' military leaders who did not welcome their presence and sometimes did not even trust them: it was better to engage in pressure and stimulus on the party to induce it to renew itself, free itself from dead weight and inferiority complexes towards the traditional political and military castes, and take on a 'revolutionary' role in deeds as well as words. All this ended up influencing Mussolini, who, irritated and disappointed in turn by having to acknowledge how few 'true young people' there were, became increasingly disinterested in the issue of volunteering and volunteers and began to focus on solutions (repealing the provisions whereby university students could postpone military service until they had completed their studies or reached the age of 27, greater control over the youth press, etc.) aimed at resolving the problem of young people and university students in particular at its root.

In the profile dedicated to Calamandrei, Galante Garrone, after recalling the harsh judgment preserved in Calamandrei's diary on

intellectuals ("ignoble rabble who made the triumph of fascism possible," cowards, servile, conformist, incapable of believing in the seriousness of life) and in particular his resentment and contempt for those of liberal-democratic education who had succumbed to fascism and for those "presumptuous ignoramuses" who translated their thoughts or lack of thoughts into the forms and jargon of contemporary art and literature raised a very important question, that of the regions and the historical validity of the judgment that Calamandrei himself simultaneously gave of young people.

His speech is based on a series of notes, mostly from 1939, but also from subsequent years, in which Calamandrei accused young people of "apathetic indifference," "absolute moral emptiness," and "utter barrenness," and accused them of no longer believing in freedom, of having renounced their own thoughts and "setting certain moral principles as guidelines for their actions," which he considered indispensable and binding. So, while young people, disoriented by "realism," were, at least for a generation, "Destined for spiritual slavery," men like him ended up feeling like "the last representatives of a civilization that is about to sink under a new invasion of barbarians, coming not only from outside, but from within, from our homes, from our children." This led to a sort of incommunicability, a misunderstanding that made relations between the surviving anti-fascists and young people, even the best, the least fascist or fascistized extremely difficult, if not impossible.² With regard to his judgment of intellectuals, Galante Garrone limits himself to describing it as "merciless." His discourse on young people is more complex.³ This, we believe, is not only because Calamandrei's view of young people was one of the reasons for the anguish that tormented him for so long during those years and for his difficult relationship with his son, but also because it contributes to giving the reader of his diary the image of a man incapable of understanding the Italian reality in which he lived and—to quote his son Franco—of 'a struggle without perspective and sometimes even without any reference point, an anguished anti-fascism, even more so than his own impotence, by the doubt of being historically condemned to defeat'. , 'a struggle without perspective and sometimes even without any reference point, an anti-fascism anguished even more by the doubt of being historically doomed to defeat than by his own impotence', which Galante Garrone wants to dispel by diminishing and impoverishing the figure of Calamandrei. Galante Garrone's analysis of Calamandrei's attitude towards young people

With great subtlety, bearing in mind his various cultural, generational, and personal roots, he highlights how more than one of Calamandrei's friends (Calogero, Montale, Carocci, Loria) did not share his views and were less pessimistic than him about young people. He concludes that 'much of the misunderstanding and resentment' of Calamandrei and those who thought like him arose "in both cases, from the sadness of the times, and more from the extreme difficulty of reacting to a situation that mostly condemned the former, the elderly, to a pathetic and inert rumination on past things, and the latter, the young, to chasing illusory mirages, detached from the harshness of the present"¹. Where the argument becomes, in our opinion, too black and white and therefore lacking is when Galante Garrone makes a clear distinction between "fascistized and vulgar young people, who curse France and England in the squares and praise the Duce and the Führer" and "other young people who are neither vulgar nor ignorant," who showed (Galante Garrone says affected) "a certain annoyance, careless and almost contemptuous, for the feelings, culture, and political ideas (liberal and democratic) in a word for the anti-fascism of their fathers, for the nineteenth-century traditions of the Risorgimento, now considered exhausted" and who were the ones who most irritated and distressed Calamandrei because of their "curiosity and taking seriously certain aspects of the fascist regime, those that were culturally less crude and, apparently, hinted at an unprejudiced nonconformism, a new social openings, at odds with the bourgeois respectability in which both official fascism and the old anti-fascism seemed to have become lazy." Such a distinction—which, moreover, does not take into account the mistakes made by the anti-fascist parties in the early postwar period, the socio-economic transformations taking place in the world and the expectations (and disappointments) they aroused, and essentially not even the crucial moment of moral crisis and, at the same time, of transition (also in the sense of the search for a new, higher morality) that characterized not only Italy but the whole of Europe and its very civilization - is in fact unacceptable to us. On the one hand, because it dismisses a priori an entire sector of youth, that of "fascistized and vulgar kids," without even attempting to make the slightest distinction within it or to engage in a non-superficial comparison (i.e., based solely on an *aesthetic-vulgar* assessment of behavior) between the substance of the moral attitude and the "fascist" aspirations of these "kids" and that of the "young people who are neither vulgar nor ignorant" that Galante Garrone mentions immediately afterwards. On the other hand, because it excessively restricts the category of "young people who are neither vulgar nor ignorant" (and, consequently, broadens

excessively the other) identifying them with the children of anti-fascist fathers (about whom, moreover, a series of distinctions should be made) or does not even consider the possibility of a third intermediate category. This not only belittles the moral drama of a far from negligible sector of a generation of young people, but also makes it difficult to understand the reasons and timing of the emergence in so many of these young people of that moral, even before political, opposition to fascism, which was a very different phenomenon (even taking into account the impact on Germans of the events of the last year of the war, especially in the east) from that which occurred in Germany. A phenomenon which, precisely because it concerned young people who grew up under fascism and not their children, has, so to speak, immunized democratic Italy from fascism and confined its nostalgies to a reality that is largely in natural decline.

A judgment not very different from that of Calamandrei (and, all things considered, Galante Garrone) can be found in many other anti-fascists. In fact, it is often just one aspect of the more general psychological attitude that characterized most anti-fascist exiles, both abroad and at home, and which Rosario Romeo captured very well when, comparing the exiles of the Risorgimento and the anti-fascists - observed that while the former wanted to eliminate the tyrants but had no ill will towards the Italian people, who for the most part passively endured or supported them, the anti-fascists, on the other hand, faced with the consensus that the tyrant had achieved and the scant or no consideration that the Italian people showed for them, despised them. And they despised young people even more, especially those from social and cultural backgrounds, and even families, who, in their view, should *naturally* have been anti-fascists but were not, and they looked at them with contempt or pity, depending on the case. That said, it must also be said that the attitude of someone like Calamandrei, although widespread among the 'exiles at home' (since those abroad are not of interest to us here) with a democratic, radical, Masonic and, therefore, broadly positivist education, was not the only one. Among others, Croce's attitude deserves particular attention. In some respects similar, but in substance very different, it explains the much greater influence that the Neapolitan philosopher had on young people and on the detachment of many of them from fascism. This is true even though, as we shall see, during the decisive crisis of 1942-43, other intellectuals had a greater influence on young people. These intellectuals were culturally close to him in many ways, but they were younger and less tied than he was to a certain worldview that had been overtaken by events. They were also much more in touch with young people and, therefore, better able to understand their psychology, problems, and needs.

Without underestimating or diminishing the ethical drama with which Calamandrei experienced fascism and—in terms of what interests us most here—the years of World War II, it seems clear that the latter were even more dramatic for Croce. His moral and political aversion to fascism (and to all forms of totalitarianism) was no less than that of Calamandrei; However, in his view, the triumph of the Axis and of Germany in particular would have had more radical consequences than those feared by Calamandrei: consistent with his vision of history and his philosophy, it would have meant the 'end of Europe' and, in practice, the 'end of civilization'. From this perspective, 'the general state of mind in Italy' (but also 'outside Italy') oppressed him too, and he too was distressed to see how many young people were seduced by fascism and even more so by the "indifference and ignorance of the so-called young people, who know nothing and are passionate about nothing, and cultivate a dull aestheticism in verse and prose, in which they shut themselves away, believing they have created a new world." However, what made Croce a point of reference like no other in Italy, and gradually in particular for a significant part of young people, was the fact that - once he had joined the opposition and especially after the unfortunate episode of handing over his senator's medal 'to the homeland' - he never gave up, never surrendered; he never performed any sensational acts (which would have been not only useless but counterproductive), but he did not reduce himself to being an "exile" in the salons and circles where most anti-fascists took refuge to reminisce about "the good old days," speak ill of the regime, and revel in the latest jokes about Mussolini, Starace, and the ignorance and stupidity of the hierarchs. On the contrary, despite his pessimism and anguish, he had continued to study, write, and publish; for himself and to set an example "of resistance and faith in the future," to fulfill, as we read in his notebooks:

my duty as a citizen and writer, maintaining in my behavior the tradition of free Italy, writing the stories of the great century that ended with the outbreak of World War II, elaborating the theory of freedom in a more precise and profound way, and in doing so not neglecting my general philosophical, historical, and literary work, that is, not letting the thread of culture fall by the wayside.

Thanks to this behavior (which, among other things, had brought back to him more than one of his old followers who had distanced themselves from him because they did not share his initial optimism regarding the Mussolini government and also...

some Gentilians who had not accepted their master's political choice), his works (in particular *Storia d'Italia*, *Storia d'Europa* and *La storia come pensiero e come azione*) and *La critica* (in which Karl Lowith, who had taken refuge in Italy for a time after being forced to leave Germany, wrote that Croce openly stated, issue after issue "what others limited themselves to ^{thinking}"¹), the philosopher had been for years the obligatory point of reference for Italian culture; especially for anti-fascist culture, but also for non-fascist and even fascist culture, which could not ignore him and had to come to terms with him in one way or another. For, as Bobbio² observed: his polemic "in the guise of philosophical criticism" was in reality "an immediately political polemic" and, on the other hand, those who approached him for his liberalism very often ended up adhering to his philosophical system as well³. Hence the prestige that, despite the silence that the fascists generally tried to impose on him, he enjoyed in the world of culture (and certainly more in the non-academic world than in the academic one) and which constituted an important point in his defense against those fascists who would have liked to silence him but who had to reckon with the political realism and intellectual coquetry of Mussolini, who did not want to "give hemlock to the philosopher" so as not to make him a martyr and an international cause and who, at least in part, was forced to tolerate him. had to reckon with the political realism and intellectual coquetry of Mussolini, who did not want to 'give hemlock to the philosopher' so as not to make him a martyr and an international cause, and who at least twice (in 1938 on the occasion of the publication of *Storia come pensiero e come azione*⁴ and in 1940 when, as mentioned above, there were those who thought of suppressing "La critica" on the pretext that the war required paper to be saved) intervened to prevent missteps by some overly zealous or timid ministers or officials. Hence the difference (objective and above all in terms of what the reaction of young people could be, and was) between Croce's attitude and that of Calamandrei and those who shared his state of mind towards fascism: for the latter, opposition to and rejection of fascism was essentially an ethical issue, while for Croce it was also a cultural issue, a way of life and an example of 'active life' and not just waiting for the end of fascism.

Although many later distanced themselves from him and turned politically towards solutions that he did not agree with and opposed, Croce, as Calogero⁵ wrote, 'was the obligatory starting point for almost all secular anti-fascists' of the generation to which Calogero belonged. This was also true for many of the next generation and even for some

a certain number of young people who, thanks to *the ethical mediation* of his works, gradually distanced themselves from fascism. During the war years, contrary to what one might believe and what has sometimes been claimed, his influence on young people declined somewhat, and in the final period, instead of stopping, this decline became more pronounced. Faced with the moral and material crisis of 1942-43, many felt that his conception of freedom was now too abstract, heralding a return to political and social solutions that were too moderate and more in line with the patterns of the past than with the spirit and needs of the new times and, above all, unsuitable for sustaining and stimulating the desire for action and struggle that now animated these young people and with them a certain number of 'elders' who until then had looked to the philosopher as the only true beacon in the night. In this context and in light of the fragmentation of liberal-democratic anti-fascism into various political formations (already underway, but effectively completed in 1942) and the slowness, caution, and tactical maneuvering with which the clandestine reconstitution of the parties and the start of their activities proceeded, a series of initiatives and spontaneous groups emerged in the intellectual and youth spheres, often led or inspired by men who were then very close to Croce but who were now champing at the bit. Partly out of impatience and a desire for action, partly out of fear that others—Catholics and Communists—would end up benefiting from the liberal-democratic stalemate; those who, while practicing the 'ethics of refusal', had not accepted the easy condition of 'exile in their own country' - had not lost contact with the younger generations (often accepting, in order not to lose them and to be able to continue to give them a 'sense of culture and life' different from that which fascism wanted to give them, to take the oath imposed on them by the regime and, during the war, to join the PNF) because they were more aware than others of the crisis that was now affecting young people and of the possibilities, but also the risks, that this situation opened up if left unchecked.

The presence in these groups of well-known intellectuals who had until then been in Croce's orbit (Capitini, Calogero, De Ruggiero, Fiore, Ragghianti, etc.), who were in contact with the reconstituted anti-fascist parties (especially with that of Action) and who played an important role in the political events that followed July 25, meant that their essentially spontaneous character was almost never grasped. And, all in all, little importance was attached to the fact that - apart from Guido De Ruggiero, whose ethical and cultural influence was due in large part to the republication in mid-1941 of his *History of European Liberalism* and to his

consequent "exemption" ^{from teaching} - the reference points for these spontaneous groups were university and high school professors; men who were known among young people not only for their scientific writings, but also as individuals, as "teachers" who had not sacrificed their understanding of culture and their moral duty to transmit it on the altar of conformism, quiet living, and career advancement. This fact proved to be very important between the end of 1942 and 1943 because it was through these spontaneous groups of intellectuals that the bond between liberal-democratic anti-fascism and a series of young people was often established. These young people, while on the one hand had already developed their opposition to fascism and wanted to give it concrete form, were often still distrustful or skeptical of the anti-fascist parties. Finally, it should not be underestimated that, in a situation of disintegration and social isolation and of persistent mutual misunderstanding between "old" and "young," as was the case in those months, these spontaneous groups often brought together people and circles that might otherwise never have met and, in some cases at least, served to establish relationships with other groups of popular and working-class origin and with a number of military personnel.

A significant indicator of the progression of the youth crisis is

from the attention that Togliatti began to devote in 1943, in his radio broadcasts from the USSR, to young people in general and to fascists in particular, as well as to intellectuals (among whom he also included students), whom he suddenly promoted from blind and obedient servants of Mussolini and his criminal policies to the "connective tissue of the nation," to those "who possess greater capacity for judgment of events and also greater capacity for propaganda and organization" and who had to save Italy by putting these qualities "at the service of the cause of freedom and the nation." Until then, the communist leader had limited himself to a few rare routine references ("The fascist leaders are making a profound error of judgment with regard to the younger generations. They think that these generations are, by definition, 100% fascist. How wrong they are!") or merely propagandistic ("The Italian units that Soviet artillery is decimating on the Don are essentially units of young people. Mussolini was afraid to send elderly men against the Soviet Union, as they would not have taken long to defect with their weapons and baggage. He sent young people. He thought that, after twenty years of military rule, young people had become ideal cannon fodder, no longer capable of seeing, thinking, or rebelling. But this is not the case."³... "The cause of youth and the cause of the Soviet Union are one and the same. It is a disgrace that must end that young people are being sent by force by Mussolini and his hierarchy to fight and die against the country that is most advanced on the path of youth, that is, on the path of abolishing all political and social privileges." References to young people became increasingly frequent and attentive to what was really happening among young people, culminating in early May in a veritable "speech to young people"⁶ which, getting to the heart of the matter, addressed the problem of the regime's new policy towards the younger generations and the disappointments and reactions aroused by Vidussoni's dismissal:

Vidussoni had been presented to young people to the sound of drums, as the typical representative of Italian youth, as the perfect leader, as the leader of tomorrow. And suddenly Vidussoni disappears without a trace, treated as a nobody. Just as Vidussoni himself treated and drove away young people as nobodies

had been clothed in the uniform and dignity of hierarchs. Every day, a new group of national and local fascist leaders disappears, publicly accused of incompetence or defeatism. And who takes their place? The youth masses see the old hateful figures of early squadristo reappearing, the champions of arrogance, corruption, and stupidity... But when have these men ever understood the aspirations of youth? Even when they accepted fascist ideology under the pressure of government propaganda, young people had not one but several substantial reservations about it. First and foremost, young people demanded freedom of criticism. They also demanded the introduction of a serious system of accountability...

It was not only the communists who paid attention to what was happening among young people. The diary of Oreste Lizzadri, one of the socialists most committed at that time to rebuilding the PSI, contains the following equally telling note under the date of January 31, 1943:

Discontent is growing, and with it, activity against the regime. However, there is a lot of confusion around; new anti-fascist groups are emerging, even among the fascists themselves, and young people are evading, if not actually fleeing, the regime, the significance and importance of which we may not be able to fully assess. In the North, as far as we are told, the sympathies of young people are directed not only towards the Communist Party but also towards the Action Party, a young party and therefore without the hang-ups of a long past. This flight of young people is, in my opinion, the real new development in the situation and the hardest blow dealt to fascism. Young people, of all people? And why now and not, for example, in 1940 at the outbreak of the war? They have received very little encouragement or example from anti-fascists, either then or now. The so-called intellectual elite either collaborates or remains silent. The most well-known leaders of the parties, their symbols, I would say, are either dead, living abroad, or silent. So what? The fact is that in 1940, young people still had a lot of faith in Mussolini, deceived and fascinated by his demagoguery of a young, proletarian Italy that had to make its way in a world dominated by colonialist and imperialist plutocracies.

The events of the last two years cannot fail to have left a bitter taste in the mouth of how many of them had taken these things seriously. Albania, Greece, Yugoslavia, the brutality of the Nazis towards the subjugated peoples, Mussolini's explicit statements that they were fighting for the grain of Ukraine and the oil of the Caucasus, the war against the USSR, the warning signs against the Jews, the struggles within the regime, before political awareness must have struck their civil conscience, leading them to rebellion. However, one thing is certain. Except for a few cases, such as the children of old anti-fascists, these young people did everything themselves. Their struggle therefore deserves all our respect and, in some cases, even our admiration.

In light of what we have said, many things become clear. We can understand the disconsolate tone (even if cloaked in apparent realism) of Carlo Scorza's last speech at the conclusion of his examination of the situation...

made at the aforementioned meeting of the PNF Directorate on June 9, 1943.

Certainly, but all in all, even after the strikes of those months, the "discomfort" and "malaise" of the working classes, and of the workers in particular, was less dangerous.

We believe we have already said enough about the former, within the limits and overall economy of our reconstruction; However, before concluding this overview of the country's attitude towards the war, it is necessary to dwell a little longer on the workers, both to understand why the police and the Carabinieri¹ considered strikes in Turin unlikely until the days immediately preceding their outbreak, "at least for the moment," serious disturbances of public order and, all things considered, continued to consider the "discomfort" of workers less dangerous than that of young people and intellectuals even after the strikes of March-April; both because these strikes—which undoubtedly, we repeat, cannot be underestimated if one wants to establish the breadth and depth of the crisis that now pervaded much of the country - have been attributed by historiography with an importance and significance which - as we have already said - are, however, excessive when examined closely and such as to give a distorted image of the reality of the last months of the regime (which, among other things, even taking into account the almost total silence of the press and, even more so, the radio, and the fear of postal censorship, is confirmed by the fact that, as is clear from police and carabinieri reports in the weeks and months that followed, they made much more of an impression on fascists, industrialists, and anti-fascists than on the masses in other regions); and, finally, to understand the value attributed to them by Mussolini.

Mussolini—as we have seen—had no illusions that this war, like any war, could be "popular," that it could inspire enthusiasm in the masses subjected to the sacrifices it entailed ("enthusiasm is already difficult for people who are inside the secret things... I reject this demand for enthusiasm because it is an idiotic demand; enthusiasm cannot last for months or years"²); what mattered to him was "discipline," and to achieve this it was essential "not to push too hard," not to impose excessive sacrifices, to try to come to an

as much as possible to meet the needs of the masses. This was practically impossible in the Italian situation, but he tried to achieve it anyway, even though, given the budgetary conditions and the shortage of raw materials and products, what he gave or would have liked to give to some he had to or would have had to take away ^{from others}. This was not only to prevent 'the pot from boiling over', in which case even the police would probably have been powerless, but because he was convinced that the masses, and the workers in particular, were more disciplined, more capable of sacrifice, and more attached to fascism than the bourgeoisie. Characteristic, even taking into account that the telegram was intended for publication and therefore also had political and propaganda value, is the tone he used on September 1, 1942, in responding to the president of the Fascist Confederation of Industrial Workers, Giuseppe Landi, who had informed him about the proceedings of a meeting of union trustees in Milan and its province held the day before:

authorize measures¹, did not consider the situation particularly worrying, to the point that the strikes in March-April took him by surprise, provoking conflicting reactions in him, initially very harsh, then much less pessimistic when he realized that the political influence of anti-fascism on them had been very limited and circumscribed, especially in Turin, and non-existent in various other locations, and that they had been caused essentially by economic factors, made more serious by the massive Allied air raids, by the mistakes made - before a n d during them by trade unions and government authorities, and by the unscrupulousness of a number of industrialists.

At the beginning of 1943, the Fascist Confederation of Industrial Workers had a vast organization, divided into 1,647 delegations, 459 local a n d 1,188 inter-municipal, which could count on just under 10,000 union officials, including over 5,500 company representatives and department correspondents, a n d it would be unfair to say that it did not seek to protect workers' conditions and the purchasing power of their wages. However, the results achieved were modest, far below the needs of the workers.

As we have already mentioned, according to CFLI data and estimates, the loss of purchasing power of workers' wages was on average 30 percent at the end of November 1941. During 1942, the situation worsened further, despite the confederation's efforts to indirectly protect wages by setting up canteens where workers could eat for free, a n d company stores w i t h controlled prices where they could find (often only in theory) products that were essential to them but practically only available a t prohibitive prices on *the black market*, a n d despite the fact that various companies granted their employees wage supplements under the table. So, a t the end of the year, as we have already seen, the conditions of industrial workers were defined by the

"Political and economic situation of the Kingdom as of December 31, 1942-xxi"
 "increasingly inadequate in relation to the cost of living,"
 "discomfort" of workers was increasing sharply, and the number of strikes was growing.

"white" and short-lived) in 18 factories in Piedmont, Lombardy, and Emilia. In January-February 1943, there were 28 strikes, which also took place in Tuscany, Veneto, Liguria, a n d Sicily (see MASSOLA, *Gli scioperi del 41. Marzo-aprile: le fabbriche contro il fascismo*, Rome 1973, p. 147).

¹ A more severe attitude was urged in particular by the undersecretary for manufacturing war who - alarmed by a few cases of worker indiscipline (actually very few and, except for four, of no significance) that occurred during the second quarter of 1942 in auxiliary factories - wanted all factories under his control to set up the "punishment rooms" provided for by the law of November 1, 1940, N o . 1782. However, the request was strongly opposed by the unions, both because it was useless and because of the negative repercussions it would have had among workers, who in many companies complained about the lack o r insufficiency of service facilities a n d would have judged negatively the use of those available for such a purpose. For further details, see G . PARLATO, *Il sindacalismo fascista cit.*, II, pp. 159 ff.; as well as, for t h e precedents of the CFLI, O . OLONA, *La confederazione fascista dei lavoratori dell'industria negli anni Trenta*, in *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi*, xxn (1988), pp. 265 ff.

"white" (usually in the form of short "work stoppages") and demands for more decisive action by the union to obtain real and substantial wage increases; demands that were supported and often spearheaded by workers who were members of the PNF and grassroots union leaders. At this point, the crux of the matter, the real obstacle, if not to resolving the situation—since accelerating inflation would have forced very small increases any way—at least to curb the growth of discontent for some time, was the confidence of Mussolini and his economic collaborators in the effectiveness of the price and wage freeze and their stubbornness in not giving it up and deluding themselves that they could resolve the situation by making it impossible to evade the hoards, crushing the *black market*, and effectively enforcing the price freeze.

It is difficult to say to what extent this government stance was shared by the CFLI and, in particular, by its leaders. What is certain is that, prior to the strikes of March-April 1943, although the confederation repeatedly highlighted the deterioration in workers' living conditions and the difficulties it faced due to the wage concessions made under the table by many companies, never explicitly raised the need to review wage policy. Instead, it insisted on a 'political' solution aimed at achieving a more equitable distribution of the sacrifices imposed by the war among all Italians, putting an end to certain of the most glaring social inequalities. To ensure that all employers applied collective agreements and social laws in full and without 'classist residues' and did not keep trade union representatives 'outside the doors' of companies; and, above all, on the solution of drastically containing prices, combating the *black market* thoroughly, and ensuring the regularity of food supplies and other basic necessities, as well as the allocation to the confederation itself of quotas of products (work clothes, shoes, bicycles, spare tires, etc.) that it distributed through its own company stores. As far as we know, the CFLI began to raise the issue of increasing wages with the Undersecretary for Corporations, Tullio Cianetti, only after the strikes in Turin and the beginning of those in Milan. And it cannot be ruled out that it was induced or encouraged to do so by the fact that Cianetti himself had spoken out in favor of this. What is certain is that Landi formulated it in the same uncompromising terms as Cianetti: no measures were to be taken until the workers had returned to "complete and total discipline"; otherwise, it would give the "propagators of attempts at indiscipline" the opportunity to assert the validity of their thesis.

"that only by agitating could we achieve what had not been achieved through the normal functioning of the trade union, political, and state organs of the

regime," the union would be discredited and those industrialists who, in order to avoid difficulties in the factory, "anticipated" government decisions under the table would appear more

'human and paternal', more sensitive than the union to the needs of workers. In order to avoid difficulties in the factory, these industrialists 'anticipated' government decisions under the table.

That said, it must also be said that two announcements contributed significantly to further aggravating the situation and causing worker discontent in a number of locations to rise above the danger level. The first announcement was that, on the twentieth anniversary of the "March on Rome," workers would receive a special bonus and pensions would be increased, and that workers in the areas most affected by aerial bombardment and subjected to a series of additional hardships (evacuation of families, decentralization of factories, reduction of working hours, etc.) would be given a hardship allowance and an evacuation subsidy. In both cases, however, the relevant measures were significantly delayed, partly due to resistance from the Ministry of Finance, partly due to the difficulty of establishing the actual cost and the locations to be considered eligible for compensation, and how to meet the expense and reach agreement among all the ministries and bodies concerned or, in any case, interested in them, and partly due to a series of bureaucratic delays and slowdowns. Thus, for example, the measures relating to compensation for workers in bombed areas, which were set in mid-November 1942, when the strikes began, were still in the pipeline. This led to a succession of conflicting rumors, requests, and protests about the delay in adopting the measures and the fear of inequalities between private industrial workers, public sector employees and those mobilized for the war effort, and state employees, which inevitably led to a continuous rise in discontent which in turn had repercussions within the CFLI.

By mid-1942, the confederation was already showing clear signs of being in difficulty and saw its relationship with workers weakening and its relationship with large sectors of the business world becoming more difficult, as they were increasingly ready, as we have said, to bypass it and anticipate it in their relations with workers. Faced with mounting discontent, its leaders found themselves in increasing difficulty between the end of the year and the beginning of 1943 and, worse still, lost the ability to realistically assess what was happening. On the one hand, they understood well the am-

While they were aware of the extent and scope of the difficulties faced by workers, particularly those in the Turin-Genoa-Milan industrial triangle, they were unable to draw appropriate conclusions from this awareness and ended up retreating behind two simplistic schematizations that prevented them from understanding anything and paralyzed them. In their view, discontent stemmed from real hardship "caused by general and specific situations that undoubtedly have their importance," but its underlying cause was "undoubtedly political." The "great mass of industrial workers" was "good, aware of their duties, and attentive to the needs of the hour"; in order to compensate for the reduced purchasing power of their wages, they wanted, rather than an increase in wages, an increase in rations and effective price controls which, combined with a firm crackdown on hoarding and the *black market*, would allow them to obtain a greater quantity of food and other products that they could not currently afford to buy. Opposite this "large mass" there was also a "minority" (which included "young people and women, who often bring to work the worries arising from the difficulties of life and are in any case more easily influenced").

"more sensitive to the subversive and propagandistic actions of elements who were undoubtedly paid and organized by enemy propaganda" which, for political and anti-national purposes, incited the "good" workers, exploiting every opportunity, all pretexts, all their frustrations, not least that caused by "the fact that certain men who hold executive positions and who should set a good example are not immune from censure and accusations now made in forms and ways that are openly distrustful." Seen in this light, it is hardly surprising that for the CFLI leadership, the problem was more political than trade union-related and, above all, a matter for the police, to be resolved primarily by eliminating the "agitators" and that part of the "minority" that had allowed itself to be caught up in their web, nor that—despite being, we repeat, aware of the growing discontent and, in some cases, even informed of what was being prepared—it was taken by surprise by the scale of the strikes and was unable to do almost anything to deal with them. Nor is it surprising that, after the strikes ended, it tried to defend itself against the accusations made against it by exaggerating their political nature and attempting to shift most of the responsibility onto the party and the police.

The overall picture of the strikes is richer and more detailed, even if not complete, and allows us to focus on some of the main

The only documentation we have on these issues is that preserved in the papers of Giuseppe Landi, based on which we have also constructed the summary table published here, relating to the period from February 1 to April 7, 1943. From a chronological point of view, this documentation¹ shows cases of work stoppages (only one, however, at the Palermo shipyard, which was quantitatively significant) since the beginning of February, more than a month before the first strikes in Turin. After these first strikes and those of March 8-13, also in Turin, undoubtedly the most important, the movement spread to various provinces of Piedmont (Asti, Cuneo, Alessandria, Vercelli), Milan, and then Varese and Como, before dying down after April 2, except for a surge on the 3rd and 7th in the Vercelli area. Ferrara, Reggio Emilia, Pistoia, Macerata, and Palermo were also affected. In Liguria, the only strike was in Vado, in the province of Savona, on March 23. Apart from those in Turin, Milan, and the Vercelli area (and the first one in Palermo on February 7), the work stoppages involved limited groups of workers and were generally of short, very short duration. Sometimes, all it took to end them was the intervention of trade unionists or the goodwill of company managers, a few modest concessions, the promise to work towards obtaining others, and the assurance that by April 21, the regime would adopt measures that would improve their conditions.

In many cases, it can be ruled out entirely that political motivations influenced them. Often it was the strikers themselves (among whom there were also many workers who were undoubtedly fascists) who, before

¹ In the Landi Archive, section "Strikes 1943." Unless otherwise indicated, the following quotations are taken from or refer to documents kept in this file.

The literature on the strikes of March-April 1943 is extensive, although generally repetitive and based on limited documentation and memoirs. To date, there has been no comprehensive study, as the aforementioned U. Massola, *Gli scioperi del '43* (first published in 1950 and which greatly influenced all subsequent works), which mainly concerns Turin and Milan, and R. Finzi, *L'unità operaia contro il fascismo. Gli scioperi del marzo '43*, Bologna 1974; more useful, despite its particular slant, is P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano* cit., IV, pp. 168 ff. On the strikes in Turin, see G. Vaccarino, *Gli scioperi del marzo 1943. Contributo per una storia del movimento operaio a Torino* (The strikes of March 1943. Contribution to a history of the workers' movement in Turin), in *Aspetti della Resistenza in Piemonte* (Aspects of the Resistance in Piedmont), Turin 1950 and id., *Problemi della Resistenza italiana* (Problems of the Italian Resistance), Modena 1966, pp. 135 ff.; on those in other areas of Piedmont, see C. Della Valle, *Operai, industriali e partito comunista nel Biellese 1940-1945*, Milan 1978, pp. 39 ff.; id., *Gli scioperi del marzo-aprile 1943. Una proposta di lettura attraverso i documenti del sindacato fascista*, in "L'impegno," March 1983, pp. 2 ff. (on the Vercelli area); R. Belmonto, *Gli scioperi del marzo 1943 a Savigliano*, in "Notiziario dell'Istituto storico della Resistenza in Cuneo e provincia," June 1984, pp. 5 ff.; on those in Milan, L. Canapini, *Una città, la guerra. Class struggles, ideologies, and political forces in Milan 1939-1951*, Milan 1988, says practically nothing, so see the two conversations with the same title by G. Brambilla, *The strikes of March 1943 in Milan*, in *Fascism and Anti-Fascism. Lessons and testimonies*, Milan 1962, II, pp. 450 ff., and in 1945-1975. Italy: Fascism, anti-fascism, resistance, renewal, Milan 1975, pp. 204 ff.; for Emilia, finally, some information in L. Orlandi, *Scioperi in Emilia nel 1943* (Strikes in Emilia in 1943), in *Storia del Fascismo italiano* (History of Italian Fascism), II: *Testimonianze* (Testimonies), Rome 1964, pp. 193 ff. Elements for an assessment of the nature of the strikes in R. Gobbi, *Operai e Resistenza* (Workers and Resistance), Turin 1973; E. Soave, *Azione antifascista e iniziativa rivendicativa nel Nord*, in *Annali della Fondazione G. Feltrinelli*, XVI (1974-75), pp. 135 ff.; *Un giorno del '43. La classe operaia sciopera*, Turin 1983; A. Ballone, *Men, factories, and power. History of the National Association of those persecuted and dismissed for political and trade union reprisals*, Milan 1987; T. Mason, *The strikes in Turin in March 1943, in Italy in World War II and the Resistance*, op. cit., pp. 399

Plant

Number
strikers

Duration of work
stoppage

Factory	Number of strikers	Duration of work stoppage
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			The country at war	93i
Factory			Number Strikers	Duration work stoppage
April 2	Vercelli	Borzalla and Lesina companies - other departments	600	(abstention until evening)
»	»	Fila di Coggiola company - Spinning Department and Equipment	400	(from 2:15 p.m.)
»	»	Fila di Coggiola Company - Weaving Department	375	(from 10:15 a.m.)
»	»	Bruno Ventre Company and Bardella	200	(from 3 p.m. to short intervals)
3	»	Vercelli Borzalla and Lesina		
»	»	Trabaldo Pietro Company of Tonella di Prax		(suspension from 11:45 a.m. with partial resumption in the afternoon)
»	»	F.Ui Fila		
»	»	Giovanni Tonella Wool Mill by Prax Biellese		(alternative stops)
»	»	Officine Giachino	40	(undulations)
»	»	Fila factory	100	
7	»	Vercelli Barbisio Hat Factory in Andorno Micca	700	

go on strike and even during the strike, they turned to union representatives to ask for their support with the political authorities and employers. The workers were essentially motivated by the growing precariousness of their living conditions, often dramatically exacerbated by the devastating effects of aerial bombardments, delays in the distribution of rationed goods and the reduction of the bread supplement, which

¹ Serious in the north, the phenomenon was even more serious in the south. From March 13 to 18, Landi visited trade unions and several Sicilian companies. On his return on the 20th, he sent Mussolini a note on the situation of industrial strikes in Sicily in which, after stating that "despite the difficulties of the moment," Sicilian workers were showing "commendable evidence of discipline and understanding," so that, "without allowing ourselves to be carried away by exaggerated optimism, we can say that, especially in the areas most affected by enemy air raids, workers are particularly sensitive to the duties of the hour," he focused in particular on the food situation, the shortage of "workers' equipment," and wage conditions. Among other things, it reads:

"The seriousness of the food situation in the centers visited is clearly evident from the information summarized below:

- bread* distribution is regular, but the quality is poor;
- pasta* distribution is delayed by a month or more;
- fats*: lard and butter are not generally distributed. The sale of oil is significantly delayed (up to four months in the city of Messina);
- meat*: there are complaints that the quantities distributed each week are often insufficient to ensure individual rations;
- offal, cured meats, legumes, and eggs*: these items are either not distributed at all or are distributed only sporadically;
- cheese, jam, and sugar* distribution is delayed by one to three months;
- potatoes*: no distribution has taken place in the new year...

The delays mentioned above force workers to resort to the illegal market to obtain the necessities of life. On the other hand, given that the prices charged on this market are, as can be seen in the table below, higher than their wages, workers are forced either to go into debt if they have exhausted their savings, or to undertake, which in the long run will inevitably affect their stamina and ability to work.

	Official prices	Illegal prices		
		Enna	Catania	Palermo
Bread	-	-	18.00	30
Pasta	2.85	20	24	30.00-40.00
Oil	12.80	40	45	40
Cheese	24.10	40	60.00	80.00
Potatoes	2.80	6	-	5
Eggs	1.90	3.50	-	-
Legumes (beans)	4.00	12.00	25.00	40
Sugar	8.40	20	-	45

One of the most important aspects of the assistance that workers urgently need is undoubtedly equipment. In this sector, assistance needs are compounded by reasons of national dignity.

In some airfields, Italian workers are employed alongside German troops and are morally and materially humiliated by a shocking lack of clothing...

With regard to absences, which undoubtedly affect the pace of production, the workers have loyally stated that greater attendance at work will be achieved following the regularization of food services and the expansion of company canteens.

Currently, many absences are due to the frantic search for food, which keeps the workers busy. workers for entire days, in the absence of regular distributions of rations assigned to consumers... To properly assess the wage situation of Sicilian workers, it should be borne in mind that wages corri-

enjoyed by those engaged in heavy work (from which women were excluded), disappointment at the failure to pay the "twentieth anniversary bonus" and the hardship and displacement allowances that had been announced to them, "non-compliance," "abuses," the "excessiveness" of some employers who refused to pay wages above the contractual minimum, paid piecework incorrectly, made extensive use of fines, and did not want to pay for hours lost due to aerial bombardments, the harsh working and disciplinary conditions that characterized many militarized companies and, in some cases, solidarity with co-workers who had been arrested, reported, or enlisted for having been more exposed during the strikes themselves or because they were considered politicized. Underlying all the strikes was fatigue with this situation and two fundamental demands: wage increases and effective price controls.¹ These demands were deeply felt everywhere, but even more so, if one may say so, in the big cities, where prices were rising.

Even in normal times, wages paid by local industries were significantly lower than the national average.

The treatment of workers, therefore, even in the pre-war period, could be described as inadequate for even the most modest living standards.

It is clear that the current circumstances have exacerbated the hardship, both because Sicily, being so close to the theater of war and itself included in the area of operations, is more affected by the disruption that the war has caused to the living conditions of the less well-off, and because Sicilian wages have generally remained tied to the minimum contractual rates. The only example of a significant increase in wages above those set by collective agreements is provided by companies that carry out work on behalf of the aviation authorities and pay their employees considerably higher wages.

However, this concerns only a few thousand workers, whose treatment, for obvious reasons, accentuates the discontent of the other, more numerous categories.

¹ Between March 30 and April 3, Landi visited various locations where strikes had taken place and summoned the

had no brakes. As far as Milan is concerned, it is extremely significant that on March 20, two days before the strikes spread to the Lombard capital, the secretary of the local provincial union of the workers in industry, Edoardo Malusardi, wrote to Landi:

the reduction in individual allocations of cold cuts (which are now given only occasionally) and eggs, which have been reduced to one egg per month; cheese, for which a further reduction in the weekly quantity is planned; all of which—as I have already pointed out—forces each worker to forge ever closer ties with clandestine suppliers and to suffer a real increase in daily food expenses of such proportions that, without any euphemism and even with the scrupulousness of strict objectivity, they can simply be described as enormous.

Unfortunately, there is no room for optimism, because once the balance has been broken and the prospect of gradually increasing the quantity of food allocated with ration cards through more efficient organization and the transfer of food from producers to storage facilities and distributors has proved illusory, the situation can only continue to worsen at an ever-increasing rate due to the dual influence of cause and effect. Thus, people's rush to obtain clandestine supplies to make up for the insufficiency of the ration card causes an ever-faster depletion of what can be given with it and further accentuates the occurrence of the latter.

It is obvious that in such conditions it is not possible to demand more, with the wage freeze, the indefinite exacerbation of the sacrifices of workers whose remuneration conditions are, for some categories, even derisory and, with rare exceptions, for others, absolutely inadequate for the current cost of living. See, for example, the categories of white-collar workers who, in general, cannot even hope for higher earnings by working harder, given the predominantly fixed nature of their remuneration.

Among the working classes, the textile and clothing sectors, which together account for around 150,000 workers, are currently affected by both the production situation and working hours, which are so reduced, taking into account stoppages and suspensions, that they barely reach a very modest weekly wage. Bear in mind that even now, with the resumption of work, the working hours for these categories are around 36/40 hours per week and that certain categories in the clothing industry, such as those employed in the waterproof coat industry, embroiderers, and workers in mass-produced linen factories, still earn L. 1.50-1.80 per hour, with a minimum of L. 1.35 per hour for adult women, which means a wage of L. 10.80 for an 8-hour day! Many categories of textile workers are also in this situation.

In the food categories, for example, adult men earn L. 2.76/3.04 per hour and women L. 1.38/1.52 per hour; adult male laborers involved in the processing of vegetable preserves earn L. 2.77 per hour.

For traffic assistants, thanks to the organization's efforts, a daily bonus of eight lire has recently been recognized, without which the wages of men engaged in strenuous work are still contractually set at 21/22 lire per day.

Finally, it must also be taken into account that adult metalworkers in rural areas are still paid an hourly wage of L. 2.63 and are subject to the disciplinary constraints of auxiliary factories that do not even allow them to improve.

A similar argument could be made for certain categories of woodworkers and other branches of industry.

As you can see, in the face of the continuous evasion of the 'price freeze', it is no longer possible to maintain the integrity of the 'wage freeze', and the constant complaints made by workers in this regard are anything but unjustified.

In my opinion, therefore, vigorous action is needed on the part of the Confederation to obtain, if not a general renewal of employment contracts, at least a revision of those relating to the most disadvantaged categories, so that we can proceed to determine a more adequate treatment for workers in order to eliminate, as far as we can, any cause of discontent that

One is the more general question of their consequences on the Italian situation. According to Vaccarino, "the day of July 25, formally provoked by a palace conspiracy," was "linked, through an unbroken chain of events... with the workers' strikes of March, the first in fascist Europe and the true precursors of the future Italian resistance." Such a judgment and others like it must either be understood in such a broad sense as to take on a flavor somewhere between the obvious and the rhetorical, or they must be rejected. The strikes of March-April were the most important manifestation of discontent and mass resistance that fascism had to face, and what made them even more significant was the fact that nothing remotely similar had happened in twenty years and their successful outcome. We would not venture to say more than this. Although the economic measures adopted after their conclusion by the regime and, already during their course, by most of the companies concerned did not solve the economic problems that had caused them and did not appease the discontent of the workers, in the following months there were other more or less sporadic work stoppages and small strikes (both in the areas that had been the scene of those in March-April and elsewhere), but nothing remotely comparable to the previous ones, not even in the areas most severely affected by aerial bombardment or even by the news of the Allied landing in Sicily. And the same can essentially be said for the July 25 and for the Badoglio period. Because the attitude of the masses

The change in the attitude of female workers was not enough – even in ^{Turin} – not even on September 18; the armistice was followed by a period of passivity that lasted more or less depending on the location and whose end – as we will see in the next volume – was largely determined once again by economic difficulties and the worsening living conditions of workers, and did not affect all workers. The importance of the strikes of March-April 1943 in relation to subsequent events should, if anything, be seen from a different perspective than that of Vaccarino: in terms of the prestige they brought to the workers and—perhaps more importantly—to the other anti-fascist parties to the communists, who, from the beginning of the strikes in Turin, in the clandestine newspaper *L'Unità*, and especially in the post-war period, made extensive use of them (typical in this regard are the various editions of U. Massola's book) to establish themselves as the first and main anti-fascist political force. Although it must be said that, at the very beginning, the 'political' outcome of the strikes was not entirely positive for the communists. After the strikes, many anti-fascists were persuaded to set aside their anti-communist prejudices and to

The communist cell (less numerous and less capable of effectively maintaining contact with "sympathizers" than claimed) had been preparing in Turin since January-February to take advantage of the discontent among workers to incite them to strike and, again, that - when the strikes in Turin reached their peak in mid-March and lost about fifteen members, who constituted a large part of its core, due to arrests by the police - it worked to extend the unrest to Milan as well. All this is true, but it is not enough to prove that the strikes were political and not economic and that the communists played a decisive role in them.

In this regard, it is necessary to clarify one point first. The idea of a mass political strike immediately proposed by the communists was immediately endorsed by the fascist union leaders and, in the wake of this, by the fascist hardliners who sought to use it to induce Mussolini to steer his policy in an intransigent direction, eliminate "the weak and the incapable," starting with Vidussoni, the "unfaithful," such as Senise, and the union leadership, which he considered, on the one hand, "weak and incapable," for another, too "classist." The communists thus found it very easy to support and accredit it, and with such "unsuspicious" endorsement, it found fertile ground to take root in the long term, even in historical circles and not only among communist scholars. In reality, the CFIL clung to the thesis that the strikes were political and that the communists played a very important role in them because, as we have said, it had lost much of its ability to realistically assess what was happening and, therefore, to try to justify its inability to foresee the scale of the workers' protest, to prevent it in some way and, once it was underway, to control it, to shift some of its responsibility onto the police and the fascist party and even onto the character of the Italian people. This was all the more so given that, faced with the

The scale of the protests at certain moments, especially in Turin (L'Unità reported 100,000 workers on strike in Turin, as in Milan, while Italia Libera reported 50,000 in Turin and Mussolini of 30-40,000 in Turin and a total of about 100,000), both the Ministry of Corporations and the PNF ended up more or less losing their heads, finding it convenient to attribute all responsibility to anti-fascist intrigues, the lack of foresight of the police forces and their weakness and incompetence, and to call for the use of force. Whereas, if anyone had not lost their heads, it was precisely the police (unlike the Carabinieri, who were more inclined to consider the strikes 'politically motivated' and, especially those in Turin, premeditated and carried out 'as part of an organized plan of action'), certainly the *local police*, since we have little and poor information about the assessments and attitude of the central authorities, as the relevant documentation from the private office of the chief of police has been lost and what Senise wrote in his memoirs is essentially unreliable and contradicted by what the head of the Ova, Leto, said. This is proven by the fact that, despite taking all the necessary precautions, not least in Turin, where a certain number of soldiers were requested to be kept 'on standby' for possible intervention in case the situation 'degenerated' the repression that was carried out was relatively moderate, less than some, even among the trade unionists, would have liked, so as to avoid provoking excessive reactions and solidarity among the workers.

With regard to the attitude of the police, it should also be noted that, while not ruling out that the living conditions of Turin's workers and employees could give rise to "unwelcome ^{surprises}" and being aware that something was brewing, at the beginning of the unrest in the Piedmontese capital they did not dramatize the situation and even when it became serious, they ruled out that the strikes were inspired and organized by

the communists. According to a telegram sent to Rome by Prefect Paliacio Di Suni¹ on the night between March 13 and 14, the communists had simply taken advantage of the situation and infiltrated the group². The fact that this was not a convenient explanation is indirectly demonstrated by the fact that even in the following days, the police's interest (including in the interrogations of those arrested) was focused more on gathering information about the structure of the party and discovering its neighborhood branches than on establishing the role of the communists in the strikes.

Since November 1942, Turin had suffered more than twenty massive bombings that had caused serious damage to a good fifth of the city, destroyed thousands of homes, especially in working-class areas, set fire to food warehouses and stores, bakeries, shops, and public establishments, and periodically disrupted the electricity, gas, water, and transportation networks, and forced thousands of working-class families to flee to the provinces, from where 60,000 of them had to commute to the city in the morning and return to their places of refuge in the evening, leaving their homes ruined by bombing and prey to gangs of looters looking for anything they could steal. If we add to this the precariousness of supplies, the insufficiency of rations, and the unstoppable rise in prices, it is hardly surprising that the fundamental reasons that led the workers of Turin to strike, and, gradually, following their example, those of other localities that part-

participated in the movement, were economic. Similarly, it is hardly surprising that in the major centers, the communists did their utmost to prepare the ground for strikes, to insert themselves into them, to try to take the lead, to politicize them, and to extend them. This does not mean, however, that they actually succeeded: in Milan and, even more significantly, in Turin, when they tried to bring workers out of the factories and demonstrate in Piazza Castello and in the streets of the Lombard capital, the workers did not respond to the call. Even more significant was what happened in Genoa, the third major industrial center of the triangle and also the target of massive aerial bombardment, where the conditions of the workers were certainly no better than in Turin and Milan, but where no strikes took place, despite the presence of a clandestine communist organization, albeit less powerful than those active in the other two cities.

And they failed for two main reasons: because their organization—organization was still too limited to carry out such a ^{demanding} task, especially after the first arrests, and because the majority of workers and strikers themselves were essentially interested in obtaining better living conditions. So when industrialists put their hands in their pockets and granted increases, various "advances," and down payments on the "Ventennale bonus" and on hardship and displacement allowances, and an official statement on April 2 announced that the trade union confederations were preparing a measure that would grant a cost-of-living allowance (varying, depending on location, category, age, and gender of the workers, between fifteen and four lire per day) and that it would come into effect on April 21, the tension began to decrease rapidly and most people showed no desire to continue the struggle, even those who had initially listened to the communist "agitators" to some extent.

What Alberto Pirelli said on March 26 to Cardinal Maglione, who had asked him for his opinion on the "recent workers' movements," is indicative:

They replied² - they are essentially economic in nature; there is no doubt that, while life in the countryside is fairly good and those in the armed forces have enough to eat, the working class concentrated in urban centers is in serious distress and the black market has reached prices that are inaccessible to this category of workers. It is very difficult to remedy this situation without creating the well-known spiral phenomenon. On the other hand, there is no doubt that there are many communist cells trying to organize the working masses, and although they have not yet gained a strong foothold, there is no other organization

workers in which the masses have confidence and which can counteract the communist one. In fact, the fascist unions have no hold over the working masses for reasons that are easy to explain, despite the fact that fascism has effectively given social and welfare policy a development that can be described as remarkable for a country as poor as Italy.

To these two reasons, a third must be added, which has only recently been brought to the attention of some scholars: the attitude towards strikes of certain leading figures in the industrial world.

As we will see in the next chapter, since the Anglo-Americans landed in North Africa, large sectors of the economy, finance, and industry had begun to distance themselves from the regime and to consider Italy's exit from the conflict. The general trend of the strikes in March-April (and not only that) must also be viewed in light of this reality.

According to Undersecretary to the Presidency Amilcare Rossi, who had traveled to Milan to commemorate the founding of the *Fasci di combattimento*, the different attitudes of workers in various factories depended more on the spirit and behavior of their owners than on the presence or absence of "hidden" agitators.

Based on the personal impression I gained from Alfa Romeo and Innocenti, respectively, - he reported on March 24 in a note to Mussolini¹, — I believe that, for the most part or almost entirely, the phenomenon is directly influenced by the fact that, rather than the organizers, the owners of the companies live or do not live with the necessary intensity the life of the working masses, whether or not they care to instill in them, when they themselves are convinced, the orthodoxy of our faith and the healthy intuition of the powerful events of today that can only derive from it.

Some CFLI executives shared this opinion. In reality, the attitude of certain figures in the economic world was much more drastic. At the same time that Rossi was reporting his opinion to Mussolini, Pirelli noted the substance of a conversation he had with Count Volpi:

He bluntly sums up his pessimistic thoughts: the country has accepted the loss of Tripoli without emotion; it will accept that of Tunis; the workers' unrest of recent days has been spineless; therefore Mussolini and the Party will continue to govern amid the inert hostility of the country. He would have hoped for a very different reaction from the workers in order to get out of the situation; he believes that those who believe in a serious crisis in the country in the event of a separate peace, a crisis due to the lack of coal, raw materials, etc., are exaggerating: the country would tolerate it without reaction (!).

Although this was the prevailing psychological attitude, few were still working to translate it into concrete action. According to the available documentation, the person who tried hardest to do so, by playing on the strikes, seems to have been Vittorio Valetta, the administrator and *deus ex machina* of Fiat's policy, who, at that time, must have been convinced that there was now a growing gap between the interests of the Turin-based company and those of the regime, to the extent that a prompt break was desirable. While waiting for this to happen, Fiat had already been working for several months to take on a sort of surrogate role for the public authorities in Turin in the social and welfare field, and Valetta had established contacts—partly to prepare the ground for the end of the regime, partly to better understand what was brewing, *primarily* among Fiat employees, and partly so as not to miss the opportunity, should it arise, to put pressure on the government to negotiate Italy's exit from the war. Thanks to these contacts and the information he had from the police, Valetta had learned of the plans of the clandestine communist organization before and better than the authorities, and even knew the date, March 1, when the communists had initially planned to start the unrest at Fiat.

The available documentation allows us to reconstruct with precision only some aspects of Valetta's behavior during the riots, while others remain unclear. Nevertheless, it is no exaggeration to say that it was as unscrupulous as it was ambiguous (so much so that Ballone wondered whether it was Valetta himself who first lit the fuse in Turin⁴) and that the general manager of Fiat played a complex game on several fronts, which must have had different stakes each time (some obvious, others apparently contradictory), but which must have aimed above all to achieve a very specific result: to exploit the strikes to further weaken the regime, while at the same time preventing Fiat from paying the price - in the present and in the future - for worker discontent and the principled hostility of the communists.

Agostino Rocca, another *deus ex machina* of big industry, behaved quite differently in Genoa, and it was largely thanks to him that Genoa did not see strikes like those in Turin and Milan. Rocca also realized that the ship was creaking and that even at An-

What characterized the mood of the workers was discontent and tension. And he, too, had some indirect contact with anti-fascist circles, so that he did not depend solely on information coming from Rome and the local police authorities. However, instead of playing on the strikes like Valletta, Rocca worked to avert them. Even though he knew that they now had very little prestige, he tried to enhance the value of the union and, in particular, the factory trustees, and to make them, together with the department heads, a channel for dialogue with the workers. Even though this was frowned upon in Rome, he did not refuse to grant advances and more or less disguised increases. and, above all, when the Ovra, fearing that the strikes would spread to Genoa, wanted to dismiss about four hundred workers and employees suspected of anti-fascism, he refused to do so, summoned those he knew to be active 'subversives' and made it clear to them that it was in everyone's interest to defend the company:

He summons the workers who are clearly at the forefront of more or less disguised "subversive activities" to his office and lays his cards on the table. He does not criticize or judge their actions or even their ideas, but asks that everything be kept outside the factory. There is no intention of threat or intimidation in those words: between the lines, he lets those who want or are able to understand that there has been a threat, but that it came from outside, that he—their boss—opposed it, and that now it is up to the "subversives" to do their part, to defend their ideas but also the company, whose well-being comes above all else. It may be a clever tactical ploy, but it works perfectly, so much so that Ansaldo - unlike other factories in the North - will continue to produce in relative tranquility, even during the strikes that will start in Turin the following November ⁽¹⁾.

The situation in Genoa was not, as we have said, the same as in Turin or Milan; the clandestine communist organization was weaker than in the other two cities; however, the condition and state of mind of the workers were the same. If the situation did not deteriorate, it was largely due to the fact that Rocca was in charge of the city's businesses and that, although he did not agree with many of Mussolini's political and economic choices, he continued to be a fascist, unlike many other industrialists and top *managers*. He did not lose his nerve and, above all, he tried to take concrete steps to prevent the strikes from spreading to Genoa.

Still on the subject of Valletta and Fiat's behavior, it is not

It is interesting to note that Leto, discussing the strikes of March-April 1922, recalled that in Rome at the time it was said

that Mussolini, in his heart and perhaps for reasons unknown or unspoken, but certainly not favorable to FIAT executives, approved of the first signs of economic malaise and almost encouraged it through the party's union representatives, only to then intervene paternalistically, strike at the employers, and win the sympathy of the workers.

The fact is that the unrest, which later led to a strike, was certainly and widely tolerated, and that the Militia legion, created and operating within FIAT, not only failed to recognize the political nature that was later attributed to it due to the form it had taken, but also participated in it widely, if not totally.

Although there is no documentary evidence to confirm this statement by the head of the Ovra, it cannot be considered *a priori* unfounded. Several factors militate against this. First of all, there were the long-standing difficult relations between Mussolini and Fiat, which the Duce viewed with growing suspicion and considered too quick to resort to underhanded counter-maneuvers and veiled blackmail whenever it had to take on burdens, in order to offload them onto the government. And, above all, the fact that it fits in well with Mussolini's more general behavior towards strikes. Not to mention his psychological attitude, increasingly hostile to the "bourgeoisie" and in particular to the "upper bourgeoisie," and the reemergence from time to time of moods and hostilities typical of his youthful socialist upbringing.

Even without taking Leto's statements into consideration, there is no doubt that Mussolini's attitude and political behavior were much more complex than is commonly assumed.

The first point to make clear is that Mussolini followed the progress of the strikes day by day, sometimes hour by hour, keeping in close contact not only with the Undersecretary of the Interior Albini and the Undersecretary for Corporations Cianetti, but also with the prefects of Turin, Milan, and Genoa. His interest was not, so to speak, contingent on current events, but rather, especially in the case of Turin, dated back to much earlier times. It was only partly a consequence of what he was told and reported by the various police forces, trade union confederations, and his collaborators about the condition of workers and, more generally, their state of mind; in fact, it largely stemmed from *his* awareness, so to speak, *of the*

nca, the result of the particular attention with which he had lived and then reflected on the experience of the war of 1915-18 and the behavior of the "home front" and the working masses in particular during those years. Two important consequences can be drawn from this. *First*, that the political line with regard to the strikes was essentially decided by Mussolini and that the various bodies involved in it had only limited room for maneuver. *Second*, it was Mussolini—despite what he said at times of particular irritation and, even more so, to appease the extremist intentions of those—and there were many—in the unions, the party, and the government who called for a tougher and more intransigent attitude—who did not want overly drastic measures to be taken against the striking workers, which he considered not only politically dangerous but also, deep down, unjustified, since—whether he admitted it or not—he was convinced that the strikes were essentially motivated by economic reasons that were more than justified, even if difficult, if not impossible, to resolve in the economic situation in which Italy found itself.

A whole series of sources testify to Mussolini's awareness of the seriousness of the workers' condition. In his memoirs Cianetti took credit for having drawn up, as early as January and despite R. Ricci's objections, "a plan to grant a daily allowance to workers forced to move their families away from urban centers and to those who had followed industries that had relocated elsewhere due to decentralization." a plan that he submitted to Mussolini in early March, who told him that, "to avoid repercussions on prices," the burden would have to be borne by the state, something that Acerbo immediately opposed, "concerned about the repercussions that the increase in circulation would have on the already highly unstable financial policy"; so that when the strikes began, it was still under discussion. The documentation preserved in Landi's papers allows us to specify when Mussolini actually gave the green light to the measures proposed by the CFLI and the Ministry of Corporations: on February 2, after a meeting of the Price Committee during which Landi had illustrated the wage situation of the various categories in relation to the real cost of living and the measures under consideration. As Landi would tell the leaders of the Provincial Union of Industrial Workers of Milan two months later: at the end of the meeting Mussolini, addressing Landi himself, said: "In the meantime, take action on the issue of allowances," then "develop a wage strategy, take the categories that are worst off and try to fix them," and gave instructions to Ricci to take action.

Although he was aware of the seriousness of the workers' situation and, at least in Turin, well informed about their state of mind and—if we are to believe what Leto wrote—although he perhaps, at the very beginning, viewed the agitation of some groups of Fiat employees (which, moreover, had not initially worried even the Provincial Union of Turin¹) unfavorably, there is no doubt that the scale of the strikes took Mussolini completely by surprise and provoked in him a series of psychological and political reactions that were initially very negative. These reactions were further exacerbated, on the one hand, by the dramatic assessments and predictions of almost all his collaborators and, on the other, by the awareness that all those within the Fascist leadership who, for one reason or another, wanted a radical change of course were throwing their weight behind them. Not to mention the Germans, whose opinions he must have known, if not known, then certainly imagined. In this light, it is easy to understand what he said at the national headquarters of the PNF on the afternoon of March 11, three days after the strikes in Turin had reached their peak:

In recent days, Turin has seen the first signs of a collective workers' movement. Here are the reasons why. Evacuation allowances had been given to the families of displaced workers; at a certain point, it was requested that those who had remained should also receive the same evacuation allowance. In general, I had always been opposed to this, but now I declare in the most explicit manner that I will not give a single cent. We are not a

especially in ^{Switzerland}, and the spread of strikes to Milan. Reports to Landi's union leaders and speeches given in various locations in the north by Carlo Scorza and Cianetti leave little doubt about this.

To this heightened state of mind must be added the harsh action that the hardliners and Farinacci himself took to exploit the opportunity and get their hands on the party secretariat, liquidate the "soft" and potential "traitors" and to give the regime's entire policy a different character, on the one hand, as we have already said, truly "revolutionary," and on the other, one of full and total collaboration with Germany. The most important episode in this action (especially for the purposes of reconstructing Mussolini's attitude towards the strikes of March-April) was a long letter that Farinacci wrote to Mussolini on April 1. Anyone who reads it, taking into account not only (and not so much) the problem of the strikes and their nature, but the entire mosaic of the political situation of those weeks, cannot fail to realize and understand that the objective Farinacci set out to achieve was much greater than what formally transpired from it. In fact the leader of the intransigents wrote:

¹ Both Radio Moscow and Radio London reported on the strikes only after they had ended. Togliatti's conversations on Radio Moscow, collected in a volume after the armistice by Moscow's foreign language editions (M. CORRENTI, *Discorsi agli italiani*), contain only one reference to the strikes in Turin (p. 268). This is a vague reference (and, moreover, not true) in the broadcast of April 18, dedicated to the replacement of Vidussoni with Scorza at the helm of the PNF. In it, speaking of terror as the last resort Mussolini now used to stay in power, Togliatti gave the example of "the shooting in Turin of a group of workers who organized a strike shouting "long live peace". Radio London did not mention it until June 28, in one of L. Z. Zenkovich's periodic "Asterischi londinesi" (London Asterisks), which reported a comment by C. F. Whittall (see P. SPRIANO, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano* cit., IV, p. 194). A large excerpt from the report dedicated by "Italia libera" to the strikes in its March 1943 issue was also broadcast (see *Radio Londra 1940-1945* cit., I, p. 373).

² In the aforementioned note to the Duce by Amilcare Rossi dated March 24, we read: "I believe that what occurred on [the 23rd] and, possibly, could still occur, is attributable, more than anything else, to the work of organizers, so that, in my opinion, in order to prevent less desirable situations from recurring, those who, remaining in the shadows, influence the masses must be identified.

In other words, the competent political bodies must be alerted to a kind of technique for identifying those responsible, since without the existence of a certain number of instigators, it would be impossible to bring about the simultaneous phenomenon of a large number of workers abstaining from work, as happened once again yesterday, albeit for a very short time, at the Pirelli factory.

Even more drastic was the MVSN Political Investigation Office. In its secret report on public sentiment in March, it stated in no uncertain terms that "the recent demonstrations by the working masses in industrial plants, although disguised under the pretext of urgent economic needs, are undoubtedly part of a vast program of mass agitation and have been organized by communist agitators, without revealing the political aims of the action, in order to create a favorable environment for upheavals of a more clearly political nature." Although indirectly (i.e., attributing the request to "men of faith" who "do not give in to temptations and pessimistic predictions"), he called for "unreserved preventive and repressive action" against all sorts of "subversive activity" and "more convincing, more inspiring action, more responsive to the material and spiritual needs of the various categories among the masses of workers, employees, combatants, and the people as a whole" (see E. GALBIATI, *Il 25 luglio e la MVSN* cit., pp. 101e 159).

³ ACS, *German Embassy*, b. 1. The letter is only partially published in F. W. DEAKIN, *History of the Social Republic*, cit., pp. 228 ff.

To fully appreciate the passage of the letter dedicated to the federal representative of Milan, Antonio Maria Del Grosso

Dear President,

quoted Mussolini. Indeed, it cannot be ruled out that Mussolini, bombarded by a growing number of reports, information, and more or less personal assessments attributing the strikes to communist initiative and thus making them essentially a political issue, may have for some time believed that he had been wrong in considering workers, and factory workers in particular, to be 'good' Italians, grateful and loyal to the regime for what it had done for them. Hurt by this, he may have listened to what he was told and, as a result, may also have thought it necessary, if the strikes were to be repeated, to use heavy-handed tactics without scruples. This was all the more so because at that moment, after eliminating some of the figures most unpopular with the hardliners, taking a hardline stance himself meant taking away from them, and *primarily from* Farinacci, the strongest weapon at their disposal. From this perspective, it seems impossible to consider it a mere coincidence that he made his most negative and harsh statements about the March-April strikes on April 17, in front of the party leadership gathered for the handover between Vidussoni and Scorza. Although quite long, the passage of his speech dedicated to the strikes deserves to be quoted almost in its entirety because only in this way is it possible to compare it with what he had said on March 11 and what he would say on June 24:

To identify what the guidelines in our field of activity can and must be, we must refer to recent events, specifically those of the first ten days of March, namely the workers' unrest in Turin and Milan and other smaller cities in Piedmont and Lombardy.

This extremely unpleasant and deeply regrettable episode, which suddenly took us back twenty years, must be viewed in the context of the international situation, namely the fact that the Russian advance now seemed unstoppable and that the "big moustache" (as Stalin is known in working-class circles) would soon arrive to "liberate" Italy...

That said, in order to place the Italian phenomenon in the context of international events, it should be added that, although the "scale" of the phenomenon was not impressive, it would be a serious mistake to underestimate its significance. The "scale" was not impressive. In fact, no more than thirty to forty thousand people went on strike in Turin and perhaps as many in Milan: perhaps a hundred thousand in the whole area. Genoa remained at work, and it must be acknowledged that the workers of Genoa generally have a strong sense of patriotism. The nature of the phenomenon also deserves our attention, because there were long strikes, white strikes, ten-minute, one-hour, and half-hour stoppages. For example, in Villar Perosa there was a 'classic' 48-hour strike, a strike by all 4,000 workers, which Senator Agnelli really benefited from in every way. Perhaps he did not do the same in Turin, but Villar Perosa is Senator Agnelli's birthplace, if I am not mistaken, and there the workers are in a position of absolute privilege compared to all the others.

The extent of the phenomenon is immediately apparent not only from its nature, but also from the fact that political speculation immediately became involved. Thus, the existing economic malaise appeared to justify the unrest that took place; conversely, this reason was used as a pretext by communist cells and also by other more or less liberal cells. So the whole old fauna, the old and miserable fauna, comes out to stir up trouble from the point of view of "separate peace."

"Increase in bread rations" (as if we did not have every interest in increasing them, provided we could), "release of those arrested" and other such desiderata.

This is what could be called the clinical picture of the facts. That is not enough. Now we must meditate on it and see if all the organisms have functioned as they should. I rule this out.

First of all, agitation of this kind does not come out of the blue like a bolt of lightning. Obviously, if there are sensitive and responsive antennae, they sense what is brewing underground and then sound the alarm, ringing the alarm bell. And they say: Watch out, something is brewing.

Conversely, Rome was not warned about this. This raises the issue of trade unions' adherence to the working masses. This adherence must exist, otherwise we are faced with these truly ungrateful and criminal surprises, which have convinced many workers that, by returning to the old methods, they can achieve whatever they want. It is useless to create so many press offices, it is useless to rack one's brains over statistics, it is useless to organize legislative offices, because all this already exists: these are superfluous duplications. Trade union organizers need to be in daily contact with the masses they claim to represent, to have the courage to support their interests when they are justified, and to confront them when it is clear that political speculation lies behind economic hardship.

Paradoxical things happened in Turin. Workers were invited to return to work with a flyer printed clandestinely. It gave the impression that no one had the courage to sign it: the Turin federal, the Turin podestà, the Turin prefect. There had to be some initials to take responsibility for inviting the workers to return to work. This flyer was a pitiful document, not only in substance, but above all in the way it was distributed. Also in Turin, when it became known that these people wanted to strike at 1 p.m., it was decided not to sound the siren, as if these people did not have a watch in their pocket or on their wrist. These are the little tricks (as they are delicately called), but I will call them tricks, with which one thinks one can skirt around and avoid the difficulties that exist. Instead, we must face them head-on, point the bow towards them.

Again. The Party. The Party, it must be acknowledged, did not rise to the occasion, neither in Turin nor in Milan. Why? Because the fascists themselves did not act in a unified manner. Some went on strike, some did not, and some came to an agreement with the strikers. One had the impression that the surprise had thrown the entire local Party apparatus into disarray. At a certain point, it was said: All fascists in black shirts. But it was not said for how long, and whether this was mandatory. It was a rumor that spread: so many put on black shirts, many did not. This also gave the sense of a rift. The federal

We went to the site, and both the federal agent from Turin and the federal agent from Milan, but I don't get the impression that they managed to take control of the situation. Why? Because at a certain point, they resorted to using war veterans. It seemed that the situation was so unstable that only war invalids, going to these workshops and reminding these gentlemen of their duty to produce ammunition while our comrades were engaged in the battle of Tunisia, seemed to have sufficient prestige to restore the situation.

This is serious! This does not mean that the mutilated should not be called upon to speak. But we must avoid them becoming "substitutes," as the Party no longer has anything to say to these masses.

Above all, it must be said that no working class in any country in the world, including Russia, which has just recently reduced wages in all war industries (and Russian workers have accepted this with tacit resignation), no working class has received from any regime what we, a relatively poor country, have given to the working class. And so you will not be surprised if I have given draconian orders to the police headquarters and prefectures.

Another area to examine: I did not get the impression that the police had the necessary drive. They didn't crack down hard enough to put an end to it. You don't get results by telling workers, "You're going to be soldiers," as if it were a punishment, "You'll lose your exemption, you'll be sent back to your countries of origin." All this showed a lack of adherence to Rome's directives. If the armored cars had fired, I would have taken responsibility for it immediately. When Italian workers murder others who are fighting, I order the shooting. This explains the change in the General Directorate of Public Security, of the Chief of Police. Because we need a fascist police force. Not an officer who is a fascist, but a fascist who is an officer. This will make many people think. And this is not the first step towards a policy that I will call, for the moment, one of rigor, except to adopt in a second phase a word that has a harsher meaning. And since it has always been said that we did not make a revolution (even though we made a very profound one, one that left a mark) because we did not exercise terror, these gentlemen will obviously lead us to this chapter as well. Then they will no longer be able to deny that the revolution had all the numbers, all the attributes.

As can be seen, Mussolini's speech moved, so to speak, on two levels. As far as the strikes were concerned, they were defined as an "extraordinarily deplorable episode" and not to be underestimated, but quantitatively not impressive, "modest." As for their causes, Mussolini had no doubts, even if his speech became a little convoluted here: the root cause was economic hardship, which was immediately exploited by the "political speculation" of "communist cells," but also by other "more or less liberal" groups; it is unclear whether the latter term referred to the liberal socialists of the Action Party or to the Frassatians and, in general, to a certain milieu, especially in Piedmont, which had always remained liberal-democratic at heart, or rather to the economic and industrial world. To this part of the

speech dedicated to strikes and, therefore, to workers (about whom, it should be noted, Mussolini did not express any judgment of merit, except, perhaps, to indirectly attribute to them a sort of *ingratitude* for what fascism had done for them and a *lack of understanding* of the economic difficulties of a country

"relatively poor" like Italy to do more) was followed by a second, much broader, detailed, and harsh one on those responsible for that "episode," those who had not foreseen and prevented it and had not been able to deal with it. And here, no one was spared: the unions, for their "lack of adherence to the working masses" and their bureaucracy; the local authorities, for shirking their responsibilities; the party, for not being up to the task and having nothing to say to the masses; the police, for lacking the necessary bite and for their lack of adherence to Rome's directives.

Even if not entirely true, these accusations were in some cases excessive and, above all, in making them Mussolini completely overlooked the fact that they could also have been levelled at him and that, at least in part, what he so harshly reproached others for was the consequence of the instructions he had given or failed to give them. From this point of view, the speech certainly sought to shift a series of his own responsibilities onto others, as did certain particularly harsh statements about the "rigor" (i.e., the use of weapons) necessary in the face of such

"episodes" appear essentially rhetorical - those referring to the past

- and in a manner - those referring to a possible recurrence of strikes - dictated by the need to silence his critics in advance and not be outdone by them in terms of intransigence. For this, we repeat, must have been Mussolini's real objective: to satisfy the intransigent, the extremists, and the Germans who had criticized the "uncertainty" of the Italians' behavior and their failure to intervene "in a radical manner," to the point of conceding a few heads to them, without however conceding anything in terms of real power, and taking advantage of the opportunity to get rid of some men and promote others without this creating any problems for him. Typical of the latter are the promotion of Cianetti from undersecretary to minister, with the excuse that a ministry as important as that of Corporations could not be run by a sick minister, and the dismissal on May 6 of Count Volpi (replaced by the much less treacherous Balella) at the head of the Confederation of Industrialists with the argument, that Landi's departure from the CFLI made it necessary to change all the confederation presidents.

No other serious explanations can be given for Mussolini's speech on the strikes. Despite everything, Mussolini was still too good a politician and knew both Italian reality and psychology too well.

the reactivity of Italians in general and workers in particular, because one might believe that he had thought or thought it possible for the future that there would be radical repression. At that moment, all his hopes and efforts, as we shall see in the next chapter, were directed towards convincing Hitler to reach an agreement with Stalin or, at least, to freeze the Eastern Front. To this end, he had already made two *advances* on March 9 and 26 and was planning to take other, more explicit steps in the near future. From this perspective, for him, everything boiled down to the need to *hold out*. *And in order to hold out*, the home front had to remain as calm as possible in every sense, and extremists and hardliners had to be given no room for maneuver. Workers, in particular, could not be subjected to further sacrifices; on the contrary, if possible, something had to be done to alleviate their condition. A policy of "austerity" towards them, other than that of trying to eradicate the hotbeds of communist and anti-fascist infection in general, was therefore unthinkable and would have produced many more disadvantages than advantages. This was all the more so because, deep down, Mussolini—whatever he might have appeared to think—must have been convinced that the strikes had essentially economic causes^{and} that the "insinuation" of communists into them had been limited and, all things considered, less serious than others, whether sincerely or instrumentally, claimed.

Confirmation of this is provided by what he said on June 24, in his famous "shoreline" speech, not so much in the text that was later published in the press as in the one he actually delivered before the Directory, famous "shoreline" speech, not so much in the text later published in the press as in the one actually delivered before the Directory, in which he stated in no uncertain terms and in a much more explicit manner than two months^{earlier} that the strikes of March-April were "predominantly" economic in nature:

The working masses. The movements other than those small ones in March, which perhaps did not need to be solemnly mentioned in the Senate, because these movements were limited

They targeted two cities, Turin and Milan, and in these cities the movements were mainly economic in nature and did not involve the entire workforce. There was an insinuation, so to speak, an introduction of communist elements; but these had invited the workers to gather in Piazza Castello in Turin and Piazza del Duomo in Milan to protest against the war. But not a single one showed up. So, basically, the working classes are doing well. And I believe that a new impetus to union life will convince the workers that the Fascist regime is

Chapter Five

Crisis and agony of the regime

A simplistic summary of what has been said so far could lead to explaining Italy's defeat in World War II and the early collapse of the fascist regime compared to that of the Tripartite in general by resorting to two arguments: Italy's objective economic and military inferiority in facing such a challenge and the responsibility of Mussolini and the regime in leading the country to face it on the basis of a calculation that was not only fallacious — a short and certainly victorious war — but which had its main *raison d'être* in a *state of necessity* that was primarily the result of the Duce's miscalculations and political errors, but which the vast majority of the ruling class of the time (and not only its more strictly fascist wing) shared or did not contest. Both true, these two arguments are, however, insufficient to truly understand both Mussolini the man and his political behavior in the years we are dealing with, as well as the limitations and inadequacy of the regime and much of its ruling class and political elite in facing the test of war with the consistency, dignity, and "morality" that, while certainly not justifying mistakes and horrors, nevertheless give them a somewhat "positive" value, in that—if they do not slip away like drops of water on a leaf after the storm has ended—they induce a people to come to terms with them, with their own history, with themselves, and with other peoples. This is precisely what is happening, in different forms and under different stimuli, in Germany, the Soviet Union and, in a certain sense, also in Japan, but not in Italy. This fact attests to the continuing fundamental ethical and political weakness of our national fabric.

After focusing on the country's attitude towards war and highlighting the link between it and events related to war *in the broadest sense*, it is now appropriate - before resuming the reconstruction of these events from the point where we left off at the end of the third chapter - to focus our attention on the impact that the regime had on it, elaborating on what has been said so far more or less *en passant* and, where necessary, broadening the discussion to include some aspects that we have not yet addressed. And this

for at least two reasons: because, as we have seen, criticism, intolerance, and the increasingly marked detachment from the regime were certainly not among the least important causes of the fluctuations and evolution of the country's attitude towards the war and Mussolini, and because - if we do not get caught up in self-serving discussions about who was the *protagonist* of July 25 - it is clear that Mussolini's ouster was a consequence of the Allied landing in Sicily, but also of the crisis of the regime (which the invasion only brought to its extreme consequences) and that this cannot be restricted to fascism, but must be seen as a crisis of the *entire* political system, without exception for any of its components, starting with the monarchy and the armed forces, which tried to take all the credit for July 25. The same, ultimately, must also be said for anti-fascism, which played a completely marginal role in the whole affair of July 25. And, if we wish, we can add a third reason to these two main ones: in recent years, historiography, especially Italian historiography, has initiated a discussion on the PNF, its role in fascist politics and society, the actual nature of its activities, and the results achieved in terms of consensus and the fascistization of the masses. This is undoubtedly important for a correct understanding of Italian fascism and its peculiarities compared to other totalitarian phenomena, but in the absence of in-depth and comprehensive studies, it still struggles to go beyond hypotheses more or less influenced by political science-type theoretical analyses. Seen in this light, the problem of the regime, of which the party was an essential aspect, and its ability or inability to perform the new tasks imposed by the state of war, seems to us to acquire a further reason for interest.

The crisis of both the regime as a whole and the PNF as the center and driving force behind both the regime and political participation and mass consensus, are full of memoirs and, more importantly, contemporary diaries. On the other hand, public statements are very few and often cryptic, which is hardly surprising, and, moreover, in general

black, they appeared in magazines and publications that had limited and largely "internal" circulation, so that they were not known to most people. Among these, it is worth mentioning, due to the authority of their authors, which compensates for the caution and cryptic nature of the discourse, the commentary *Precisazioni (Clarifications)* that Farinacci dedicated in "La vita italiana" in December 1941 to the collection *Pagine di Critica fascista (Pages of Fascist Criticism)* edited by F. M. Paccas, and the essay-assessment *Ventanni di Critica fascista (Twenty Years of Fascist Criticism)* published by Bottai on May 15, 1943, in "Primato." Written in very different circumstances and with very different intentions, both articles reveal a thorough criticism of the party, but, on closer inspection, also of the regime. Farinacci essentially blamed the party for its inability "at the moment of decisive crisis" to become, as in 1925, a force for the reconstruction of the state and to inspire in the people a "more conscious, richer, and more powerful" will to fight against "so many fearful and cautious men" and, above all, against "so many businessmen who were accomplices or victims of the Jewish octopus." For Bottai, on the other hand, the party, on the one hand, was unable to give itself a precise identity and oscillated between the extreme suggestions of the anti-party and the hyper-party, with the result that it failed in its function as an indispensable instrument for the "cohesion and direction" of the masses, and, on the other hand, it was guilty of bureaucracy and incapable of that "perpetual contact of spirits, intellects, and souls" indispensable for converting these into a common energy and a "point of departure no less than of arrival." Behind these criticisms of the party, however, it is possible, as has been said, to glimpse a more general criticism of the regime; barely perceptible in Farinacci, clearer in Bottai, who, moreover, wrote at a time when the crisis of the regime was now obvious to everyone and its denunciation easier, especially if, speaking to his mother-in-law so that his daughter-in-law would understand, the argument was developed, as Bottai did, not with direct reference to the moment, but in 'historical' terms and speaking not of the regime, but more generically (and vaguely) of fascism. Typical in this sense is this statement, formally referring to the period immediately following the seizure of power in 1922, but essentially aimed at summarizing the situation at the time:

In a certain sense, it can be said that *fascism is not in crisis, but that fascism synthesizes the crisis of Italian life as a whole: a crisis of formation, a crisis of growth, a crisis of the definition of values.*

More emotional, if you will, but much more explicit is what G. A. Fanelli wrote a month later in *Il Nuovo Occidente*. True to his character, Fanelli immediately took the bull by the ^{horns} and, given that "a

regime is great not for the principles it professes but for the method with which it governs," he launched a fierce attack against what he saw as one of the most serious and obvious evils of the regime, arguing that it must be eradicated at all costs: the confusion between politics and administration, between bureaucracy and the ruling class, and their constant struggle to overwhelm and replace each other, outdoing each other in every way in a race for popularity, for which only the country paid the price.

The complaint was not new; a couple of years earlier, Alberto De Stefani, in his essay *Confidenze e convinzioni* (*Confidences and Convictions*), had already spoken of the "spurious identification of the state with the administration" and warned against the dangers of a state that was not political but administrative or corporative, in which organization would be the end rather than the means of politics, and the party would exhaust its function in a myriad of new tasks, important but such as to cause it to lose its revolutionary and totalitarian character and adherence to the "spiritual needs of this totality" and with it its capacity for concrete political intervention.

When bureaucracy usurps political power despite its categorical inability to exercise it, De Stefani wrote, the totalitarian state is reduced to an administrative organization acting with full powers. It creates and maintains outside itself a foreign and autonomous reality, nourished and sustained by those same feelings, by that living and fresh humanity that can only find in the political body that represents it the capacity for interpretation and assimilation. Hence the detachment and clash between the ever-renewing living people, between their human needs, its sense of an orderly and efficient community, and the incomprehension of the administrative state, which is backward, with its loss of vital force, with its static nature that is not stability, with its complications and compromises that are not adherence, with its presumption that is not collaboration. The revolution dies or is exhausted in the administrative state and, in the best case scenario, is deformed, delayed, and opposed by it... This excess of the administration beyond its executive competence compromises the state as an autonomous political reality and communicates its own sterility to it... The danger of administrative states lies in their inability to assimilate the complex potential of the people in the legislative-organizational sphere, and it is precisely from this inability that the antitheses that can overwhelm them arise and loom large. The greater and more insidious is the danger inherent in identifying the state with the administration, the more extensive its economic functions are. Because the state thus identified becomes both judge and party, and because the climate of private interests that prevail there insinuates itself into the administration, pervades it, and degenerates it, with moral and political damage to the state insofar as and to the extent that it identifies with it... In totalitarian regimes unified in a party, it is the party itself, the synthesis

dynamics of a community of feelings and will, which implements national goals and anticipates their conception with its sensitivity. The political function is therefore a specific task of the party, which, in order to be in tune with the profound examination of spirits, must know how to interpret and represent it... An overly timid and narrow, and constitutionally erroneous, conception of the party's position and tasks, its self-limitation with regard to the administration, have caused and legitimized a certain indeterminacy in the relationship between the state and the regime, that is, between the administration and the party. In order to rebuild political and revolutionary unity, the party must actively assume the exercise of political power within itself and its organs, even if this leads to a revision of the current sphere of competence and administrative hierarchical positions in order to subordinate them, without interference, to this unitary power, without disrupting the administrative function with excessive interference in general political directives... The revolutionary logic and its demands for unity have overlooked the corrosive and reductive power of the state administration. It is therefore not surprising that revolutionary initiatives have found a dubious, uncertain, tardy, and disorganized interpreter in the public administration, because it is unsuited to the political task and because it is traditionally and instinctively anti-revolutionary. In addition to the administrative sector, the same resistance to the spirit of revolution has been found in the economic sector and its organs, where the coalition survives behind the corporation, accompanied by attempts to use its institutions to gain particular advantage... The feeling among the peoples governed by totalitarian regimes that they are not understood by those regimes, that they are blocked by their incomprehension and hostility towards such incomprehension, needs to be remedied by the dynamic contribution of the party, which provides the primary nourishment and the criteria to which administrative rules must conform.

Although the political background behind it was clear, De Stefani's stance remained, as can be seen, mainly at a theoretical level, in terms of political science, which, while not diminishing its significance, on the one hand gave it the character of a sort of 'useless sermon', destined to find an audience almost exclusively in very limited circles. On the other hand, it had led some to believe that the former minister had exaggerated his tone because he was influenced by the irritation of the many senior officials whom Mussolini had suddenly ordered to go to the front a few months earlier, despite the important positions, including government positions, that many of them held, by the unfavorable reactions aroused by the rumors that had begun to circulate at the same time about the Duce's decision to "govern with the directors-general" and by the fact that the party had not even felt the duty to attempt to defend its prerogatives or to make known to Mussolini, if not its dissent, at least its "subordinate" ^{opinion}. This helps to explain why, even though it did not say anything substantially new, Fanelli's article had such an impact.

greater than De Stefani's article. Compared to it, the article by the editor of *Il Nuovo Occidente* had the advantage of a tone that was not at all theoretical but, on the contrary, openly polemical, which was now amply justified by a situation that had become evident to everyone, so that it could not give rise to doubts about its instrumental nature, such as those that had, to some extent, undermined the credibility of De Stefani's 'warnings'. Nor can another fact be underestimated: while De Stefani had essentially attributed most of the responsibility for the confusion, of the interference and conflicts between politics and administration to the 'usurpation of power' by the bureaucracy, for Fanelli it fell more on the political leadership than on the bureaucrats, who had mainly taken advantage of the moral weakness of what he euphemistically called 'political gagaism' and the political weakness of the state and the party; so that - although he said that it was against 'political gagaism' that it was absolutely necessary to act with the utmost firmness, even at the risk of unpopularity — it was clear that his criticism also extended heavily to the entire regime and that with his request he was expressing a mood that was widespread throughout the country (and on which anti-fascism largely relied) and which found consensus.

- with different emphases and perspectives, of course - of ordinary people, "good patriots," and "hardline" fascists.

Despite its journalistic style, Fanelli's article is the most illuminating piece published during the war by the fascist side on one of the major issues that developed during the war years with the crisis of the regime and, in many cases, the progressive paralysis of the state mechanisms that were supposed to preside over various aspects of national life in general and the war effort in particular. Hence its continuing interest for historians today, which in our opinion justifies quoting it at length.

The confusion of functions and tasks and the rivalries that arise from it—Fanelli wrote after denouncing the competition and efforts of the bureaucracy and the ruling class to replace each other and prevail over the central political authority, i.e., the state—have different origins, namely: the systematic introduction of political elements into diplomacy, internal administration, the armed forces, and the judiciary; the economic and moral equalization of political positions with administrative offices and the consequent creation of a sub- or pseudo-bureaucracy, which tends to stabilize itself by transforming the position assumed into an office or by jumping from one position to another. In addition to these systems, which clearly disrupt the principle that subordinates administration to politics, there are more serious dysfunctions: the decline of political control by the ruling class, involved in active administration, and the adoption by politicians, in order to avoid responsibility, of *the same information notes* that bureaucracy usually uses.

But if competition leads to rivalry and war, war leads to the suspension of hostilities, armistices, and compromise peace agreements, through implicit or explicit agreements between the ruling class and the bureaucracy, which lead to a veritable corruption of the two systems, administrative and political, since one ends up making available to the other the prerogatives and means that are proper to its function, thus sacrificing the money and laws that preserve the state to the most influential interests.

In this climate of disarmament, the method of concession, abdication, and favor is launched without restraint. And, as often happens in the moral order, where practice sinks into corruption, the more loudly is proclaimed the observance of austerity and rigidity of custom, so it is in the political order, where the more administration becomes a matter of compromise, the more the field reserved for public institutions tends to widen.

The race for popularity is thus open between the ruling class and the bureaucracy. One sympathizes with the burdens borne by the greater ones and concedes; one is moved by the troubles suffered by the lesser ones and concedes.

The great touchstone of relations between politics and administration is constituted by state supplies, where the first and most dangerous slippages occur, starting with monetary inflation which, by putting pressure on contract prices, breaks through and spreads beyond the barriers of income blocked by pay rises, subsidies, bonuses, and the high cost of living.

But that is not the only slippery slope down which this sort of political gagaism slides. Less conspicuous but certainly more dangerous are: the game of importing raw materials, whose price affects production costs, ensuring on the one hand a larger profit margin for entrepreneurs, while on the other hand circumventing the liabilities of the public economy; the freedom of entrepreneurs to choose the most profitable products and their consequent desertion in the face of the tasks assigned to companies by reasons of state; the granting of state subsidies for works that are either not of public utility or are only apparently so, or in any case are out of step with the most pressing needs of the moment; the enactment of laws that openly alter the balance achieved in certain relationships between finance and the economy, industry and agriculture, capital and labor, imports and exports. But if we then move from the realm of economics to that of morality, we see that political gagaism is the most insidious weapon that can be used from outside and inside, through the designs of foreigners or the betrayal of citizens, with the aim of ruining not only the state but the entire country. Political gagaism, operating on a moral level, promotes the valorization of figures inclined towards a policy of concessions, either due to congenital weakness, a disposition towards compromise, or an inability to resist the seductions of homage, ranging from public office to participation in business. Therefore, political gagaism discards tough men, tenacious in their roughing out, with brisk manners and clear positions, preferring instead yielding and unprincipled souls, men with a servile and submissive character, an easy vehicle for popularity.

The responsibility for the situation denounced by Fanelli certainly fell to a large extent on the party and on the men who took turns at its helm during the war years: Muti, formally (since June 1),

Mussolini entrusted the party to Pietro Capoferri, having asked Muti to return to the Air Force to participate in ^{the war}, until October 1940, almost certainly the most inefficient of all the secretaries of the PNF, so much so that, just a few months after his appointment, even those who had supported it, starting with Ciano, could not wait for him to be "replaced." Serena (for Bottai, "the triumph of common sense, or rather, of common sense so common that it prevents any broad vision outside of ordinary common sense, which kills political sense")³, whom Mussolini preferred to R. Ricci and Prefect G. B. Marziali until December 1941, when, after a violent verbal confrontation, which almost degenerated into a brawl, with the Minister of Agriculture Tassinari in Mussolini's antechamber he was dismissed and replaced, to everyone's surprise, by Vidussoni, who was virtually unknown even to the regime's top brass. Born in 1914, Vidussoni was the youngest secretary of the party. A war invalid and gold medalist from the Spanish Civil War, his political and party experience was extremely limited: federal secretary of Enna from

From August 1, 1940, to November 8, 1941, he was secretary of the Guf for a few weeks, a position from which he moved on to become secretary of the PNF solely and exclusively at the behest of Mussolini, who, with his choice, aimed to rejuvenate the party and finally "make way for the young" and the combatants in particular, and to personally take control and leadership through a man of his own choosing, unconnected to any of the various power groups and tendencies that afflicted and discredited him. Apart from Muti's, however, no other choice proved so wrong and soon, partly because of Vidussoni's inexperience, partly because he lost what should have been his *trait d'union* with him (Carlo Ravasio, whose relationship with Vidussoni quickly became semi-conflictual), and partly because he was pressed by other commitments and gradually became more aware of the man's inadequacy, Mussolini gave up the idea of ruling the party through him, so that it ended up being increasingly effectively led by Mario Farnesi, one of the deputy secretaries, certainly more capable than Vidussoni, but also a pale figure, so much so that when Scorza took over the secretariat in April 1943, he was also ousted from the national directorate.

The responsibilities of these men (we will discuss Scorza later) were—

There are certainly many. One of the most serious, common to all of them, was that they failed to curb and, indeed, encouraged the hypertrophic growth of the party and its dependent organizations, even creating new ones, as if the strength of the party and, therefore, of the regime depended not on the quality and activism of its members, but on their number and the "categories" they represented and controlled. The table below is eloquent in this regard and shows how the number of members of the Fasci continued to grow even during the Serena and Vidussoni administrations, which, in this respect, were characterized by a certain tightening of the reins and a purge whose actual dimensions are difficult to specify, but which is probably not far from the truth if quantified at around 200,000 cases. If we add to this the annual 'fascist levy', which was between 260,000 and 270,000 members, it is clear that even under Vidussoni, the PNF grew by more than half a million members, most of whom were coerced (membership was 'reopened' for certain categories, particularly former combatants who did not

had wanted to enroll on other occasions) and, therefore, politically unreliable for the most part.

Another, even more serious responsibility was that of having greatly expanded the sphere of competence and activities of the party and its affiliated organizations, projecting them into areas and sectors where their presence had been relatively modest before the war (for example, in overseas territories) and where they therefore lacking experience and creating a complex web of liaison offices with ministries and military bodies and relationships with a whole series of institutions, bodies, and public and private companies, which immediately proved to be a cause of dispersion of energy, overlaps, functional delays and, therefore, misunderstandings and conflicts that often took on political tones due to the animosity towards the military and the populism that characterized a large part of the party leadership and the fascist cadres involved in these activities.

Some of these activities, particularly those aimed at assisting military personnel, their families, and workers who had been militarized or mobilized to the front lines, were useful, even if they would have been better managed by other organizations with more specific skills and experience. Others, however, such as those relating to the study and organization of civil mobilization were virtually useless, often due to their low technical and cultural level. Still others would have been much better managed, both politically and functionally, by the ministries and technical bodies to which they institutionally belonged, or by the party limiting itself to political and propaganda support, without getting involved in specific choices and measures. Typical examples of this are the 'fight against waste' and the collection of scrap metal, which the party wanted to be placed under the 'direct control' of the federal authorities. The most serious case, however, was that of the regulation of supplies and prices.

Not satisfied with the fact that the chairmanship of the interministerial committee for the examination of food supply problems had been assigned to his secretary, in July 1941 the P

for examining food supply issues had been assigned to its secretary, in July 1941 the PNF set up a Central Committee within its national directorate to coordinate and control the pricing of essential foodstuffs, which, in theory, would have

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operate in agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, but which, in practice, as an offshoot of the former, acted centrally and peripherally (where similar subcommittees were set up in all federations) in a largely autonomous manner and on the basis of a program that provided for the "identification of widely consumed goods that constitute the indispensable basis of the people's diet," the 'setting of prices for each type of product, after examining a n d specifying the actual cost elements', the 'setting of criteria for price increases between the production center a n d the sales center', the 'regulation a n d control of prices at the various stages of handling o r transfer of products (production-industry-wholesaler-retailer-consumer) ," a n d the "control a n d assistance of all agents in the economic field from production to consumption through the voluntary work of the widespread Fascist organization of men a n d women." Following this path, the committee, wanting to make the party the institutional body responsible for the interests of the people and the fight against speculators, aimed within a few months to *regulate* "prices" for a whole range of products, most of which were not (or not yet) subject to rationing a n d therefore essential for the diet, especially for the less well-off: sheep, goat, and pork meat and related products, beef offal, preserved meat a n d fish, rice, fruit (fresh a n d dried), citrus fruits, potatoes, onions a n d legumes, chestnuts, tomato preserves, wine, oil, eggs, sugar, a n d charcoal. A n d from price 'discipline' he soon moved on to price 'control', citing the need to combat hoarding of production, stockpiling, the "black market" and rising prices.

In the summer of 1942, Mussolini mobilized the entire party to combat evasion of the stockpiling measures.

"inconveniences and transgressions," but in reality intervened on various occasions, more or less harshly, to directly *remedy* these inconveniences and *punish* the transgressors. Nor was this the only type of intervention implemented: in the fall of the same year, for example, the PNF secretariat, with the aim of making the food services of the Ministry of Agriculture more "incisive and dynamic," seconded a number of former senior federal officials to the ministry, almost all of whom lacked specific expertise, but who were supposed to put 'bring its 'arthritis' and 'corrupt' bureaucracy 'into line with fascism'.

The consequences of these initiatives and activities, often entrusted to individuals who lacked adequate training or who were driven by a fanatical desire to "reach out to the people," if not by a desire to show themselves to be zealous and thus advance their careers, are easy to imagine. On the one hand, they gave rise to a continuous series of conflicts with the technical bodies responsible for food supply, primarily the Ministry of Agriculture (which helps to explain the altercation between Serena and Tassinari in Mussolini's antechamber), which could not accept the party's hasty approach to food supply problems, and in particular the overly simplistic economic criteria with which it wanted to set ^{prices}¹, and with the General Directorate of Public Security, which, faced with the 'police ambitions' of the PNF, in November 1941 even requested Mussolini's personal intervention to put an end to them and thus avoid the risk of disturbances to public order. On the other hand, instead of containing prices and ensuring greater availability of goods, they contributed significantly to the decline in availability and the increase in prices and the 'black market' in general. Thus, in the final analysis, the actual result achieved by the party was to give rise to new reasons for discrediting itself and the regime and a series of hostilities and accusations of inefficiency, wishful thinking and, *last but not least*, of wanting to extend its control over the whole of national life by any means necessary.

That said, before proceeding further in examining the situation in which the regime found itself during the war years and the substantial failure of the PNF, which in many respects should have been the backbone of the regime, it is necessary to make it clear that in order to truly understand the nature of the regime's crisis and its relationship with the situation in the country, it is not possible to refer only to the mistakes and responsibilities of the party, the personal and political limitations of its leadership, and the generally low level of its peripheral cadres, nor to underestimate them with the argument that, in any case, they were not the ones who determined the

end of the regime and July 25, but the events of the war and, underlying them, the objective impossibility for Italy to face a challenge so far beyond the capabilities of its economy. Other totalitarian regimes—both Nazi and Soviet—made equally serious mistakes, and their parties had leaders who were, on average, no better than those of the PNF: yet they managed to keep the internal situation under control (and not only through the use of terror, which, in any case, it is necessary to understand why it was not used by fascism) even in the face of tougher challenges. If they collapsed (the Nazi regime) or found themselves close to collapse (the Soviet regime), this was only as a result of the events of the war and, in the case of the Soviet Union, of particular circumstances that had no counterpart in Italy. In contrast to these, already after the first months of the war, the fascist regime showed, *precisely as a regime*, serious signs of disintegration, degeneration, and sclerosis which – albeit through accelerations and slowdowns connected with the course of the war – gradually increased and influenced the whole climate of the country and its attitude towards the regime itself, so that it can be said that at the time of the final crisis it existed almost only in name and that the Allied landing in Sicily was much more the occasion than the cause of its collapse. As for the PNF, which was supposed to be 'the blood circulating in the veins and arteries of the national organism', 'the engine that drives and moves national life', the instrument for energizing the entire population, imprinting at all levels 'a direction in political conduct that guarantees the high, constant spiritual temperature of Italy at war'² and which also had at its disposal an imposing organization and resources³ that, in theory, should have

At that particular moment, the regime was the best he could have hoped for, given his realism. Without dwelling on things already said, it suffices to recall three aspects of that regime that were most advantageous to him: 1) based as it was on a series of balances and compromises, it politically enhanced his role and image, making him the source of power and the arbiter to whom one could turn to remedy or rebalance situations that threatened or had altered those compromises and balances; 2) thanks to his personal prestige, this 'arbitral' function, and the fact that he held far greater powers, he was able to continually erode, to his advantage, the increasingly substantial margins of power held by the other partners in the regime; 3) this type of regime allowed him to resolve in the best possible way the otherwise unsolvable problem of the party, given that, on the one hand, he could not do without it because it ensured his own *deterrent* force and was necessary for the formation of the younger generations of the "Littorio," but on the other hand, he could not accept its extremism and anti-system stance. Now, once the *totalitarian turn* had begun, in order for it to be realized and effectively transform the character and supporting structures of the regime, time and freedom of movement were needed, which alone would allow Mussolini to maneuver and keep at bay all those who would be harmed by it or who, in the fascist camp, would try to take advantage of it to strengthen their power and direct it according to their aspirations; all this, however, while minimizing rifts, avoiding the formation of more or less hybrid alliances aimed at defending their own power and, on the contrary, trying to involve as many of the forces present as possible and even using them to achieve the unchallenged power of the totalitarian state over society. This meant, with particular reference to the party, keeping the Farinacci, but also the Bottai and even the Starace, at bay, using them against each other so that they would neutralize each other, while at the same time promoting *new men*, "Mussoliniani" rather than old-style "fascists," and the party itself, not as the political driving force behind the 'fascist revolution' and its new state, but as a *bureaucratic* instrument, as indirect as possible - i.e., through the mass organizations dependent on it, such as the Gii, the Ond, the rural housewives, etc. - for the homogenization of society, the political education of the masses and, therefore, consensus. For Mussolini could accept everything except the idea that the party would regain autonomy and initiative...

politics with respect to the state. Even aside from his deep-rooted distrust and hostility toward the party, this would inevitably have disfigured the "originality" and "ethical, cultural, and legal modernity" of the fascist dictatorship and led the regime to take on a character similar to that of the Nazis. This outcome was not only opposed by the vast majority of the ruling class and by fascism itself not to mention the Church, but was also rejected by Mussolini himself, both because he considered it damaging to his image and to his domestic and foreign policy, and above all because he considered it incompatible with the values that he believed would form the basis of the "new civilization" of the 'new society' and therefore of the 'new order' that he was convinced fascism interpreted and should mark with its 'Roman wisdom and sagacity'.

An operation of this kind, already difficult in itself, required—as has been said—time and freedom of movement, two things that Mussolini lacked in the second half of 1939 and even more so after his decision to enter the war. At first, he probably did not worry about it in the least. In the prospect of a short war, a setback of a few months (during which he would have centralized the management of all national politics in his hands and thus prevented any initiative that could strengthen the party) meant practically nothing and, indeed, favored his plans: once the war was won, everything would be easier, as no one would have had the opportunity or the courage to oppose him, nor to attempt to put together "underhanded" stopgap maneuvers such as that attempted in the summer of 1940 by the Confederation of Industry to exclude corporal legislation and legal norms reflecting the corporative order from the new civil code. However, the situation soon changed. First, the dramatic events in Greece, then the transformation of the prospect of a "short war" into the reality of a "long war" and their repercussions at all levels of national life had in fact placed Mussolini in a position where he had to rethink the entire process of totalitarianization of the regime and find a solution that was appropriate for the moment. A solution, that is, that would benefit the regime without upsetting too many people, preferably none, but at the same time would not co-

Mussolini's personal prestige was also deeply affected. So much so that on December 21, speaking with the king's first aide-de-camp, General Puntoni, Colonel Amé went so far as to describe the prevailing mood among Italians at that time as "similar to that which gripped the French on the eve of catastrophe" and spoke of "moral bankruptcy" and, with regard to fascism, of the most serious crisis it had ever faced².

The situation was extremely serious at all levels, but it was even more serious, so to speak, at the top of the regime, in the military, but even more so in the political sphere. And this was not only among former supporters and the few, very few, who had been opposed to intervention in the war, but also among the old fascists who made up the regime's *leadership* and among those who had been supporters of intervention and had worked for it. For, on closer inspection, although there were profound differences between their recipes for dealing with the crisis - when there was not a complete vacuum - these did not clash with the type of reaction provoked in them by the Greek affair and then by those in Taranto and North Africa; in particular: a common belief that the dramatic nature of the crisis required a radical revision of the way Mussolini had dealt with and managed the war up to that point, and of the very 'system of government and command, centralized to the point of abolishing all competence and responsibility' to which the regime had been reduced. "A system," in the words of Bottai: "which cannot be criticized for its shortcomings and faults, because if you strike it in one place, you strike it at its core." This was a largely justified reaction, but it was undermined by the fact that, with the sole exceptions of Farinacci (who was the only one to immediately address the situation in terms that, however one judges them, were politically positive, without the pseudo-intellectualistic, moralism, or cynicism, which for the others were mainly a way to justify their passivity and their avoidance of responsible choices⁴) and Grandi (who was

the only one, in the end, capable of taking political and moral responsibility for Mussolini's political liquidation and devising a plan—how realistic it was is another question that does not concern us at the moment—to pull Italy out of the predicament in which it was sinking) For these men, it ended up being not only fruitless, but largely the result of years of carefully hidden frustration and resentment towards Mussolini. a Mussolini who had 'disappointed' and 'mistreated' them, who had failed to listen to them on many occasions, but without whom they knew full well that they would have been nothing, or at least would not have achieved the power they had achieved and the benefits associated with it.

Memoirs and, above all, diaries are eloquent in this regard and offer an insider's view of the crisis, of the disintegration of the regime's *leadership* after the first months of war, which is essential for understanding the crisis of the regime and Mussolini's state of mind and behavior. A disintegration that—with the exception of a few men such as Pirelli and Grandi (not coincidentally peripheral to the core *leadership* in terms of education and direct knowledge of other national realities)—who, while not failing to criticize, and harshly, Mussolini and the regime, they adopted a more responsible attitude - involved, albeit to varying degrees, almost everyone, so much so that some - few in truth - while remaining 'marked' forever, would later manage to react.

"positively": "simple" men like Cianetti or men seasoned by experience like Rossoni; figures now reduced to the role of hysterical Cassandras, such as De Bono, or fully involved in the attack on Greece and concerned only with shifting their own responsibilities on to Mussolini, such as Ciano; intellectuals who had claimed to represent the elite of fascism, such as Bottai. A disintegration, once again, that manifested itself in many ways, including one that was destined to characterize the new reality of the regime determined by the failure of the attack on Greece and which cannot be ignored in order to understand both this new reality and

from "Critica fascista" edited by Paces, published in "La vita italiana" in December 1941. More explicit, partly because it was private and partly because, we believe, it was written at the height of the Greek crisis, is the attempt made with Grandi, to whom Farinacci

Mussolini's behavior, and, on a more general level, the character and limitations of traditional fascist *leadership*, its failure to establish itself as a true ruling group capable of acting as such and of being aware of this, and therefore the moral strength to react to difficulties (unlike the Soviet and Nazi regimes, which did not falter in the most difficult moments of the war and rallied around their respective leaders and regimes) and the awareness of the damage that this failure to do so caused to the country and to the idea it claimed to embody.

The Greek crisis, in fact, on the one hand prompted many to distance themselves more or less consciously from Mussolini, and on the other hand led to the start of a new type of relationship, of ^{friendships}¹ based, however, almost always not so much on a genuine desire to work to find a way out of the situation in which Italy found itself, but rather on a shared, impotent resentment towards Mussolini and the intention to create a system of mutual solidarity aimed at averting the risk that the "leader" would remove them from power. Decisive in this sense was the impression made, even among those who had not shared his positions and had fought against him, by the defenestration, in May 1941, of the chief of staff of the Militia and the 'retirement' of an 'old fascist' like Starace. For none of the many critics of Mussolini and the regime

(who, when they were among themselves and the military situation was more critical, spoke as "an ^{opposition} group," except when the situation improved, in which case they often returned to flaunting their confidence in victory and sometimes even their "devotion" to the "Duce") thought at least of withdrawing from political life, but on the contrary, they all clung to the power (or the appearance of it) they had, resorting to every expedient to preserve it, not excluding that of currying favor with the new powerful, even those they considered the most nefarious. Just as no one, faced with the drama that was looming ever larger over the country day after day, asked themselves whether Mussolini's responsibilities, faults, and mistakes were not merely the consequence, the fruits of that system—fascism—for which they were no less responsible than he was.

"leader" and in whose validity they continued to believe; so that for them, attributing responsibility for all failures to Mussolini ended up being—whether consciously or not, it matters little—a way to shirk their own responsibilities and reaffirm the goodness of their intentions and the validity of "their" fascism, 'distorted' and 'corrupted' by Mussolini, and to justify their own passivity, their lack of ideas and initiative, their floating on the crisis ('in general', Ravasio³ noted in January 1942: 'I notice a great deal of confusion of ideas in everyone: no one is concerned about the war; everyone is more concerned with their personal positions, which they want to improve or regain if they have lost them'), without really addressing the problem of the war and how to get out of it, nor the other problems that the regime had ahead of it. It was almost as if Mussolini's faults and mistakes, if they absolved them of their own past faults and mistakes, authorized them to place on him, and him alone, the burden and responsibility of finding the necessary ways out. This led to the extreme case of Ciano who, resigned to the idea that the only possible way out was now a German victory—in which he did not believe—ended up in 1942

"close shop" and show "exaggerated, albeit muted and somewhat sullen, compliance" towards ^{Berlin}⁴ and adopt an attitude halfway between pity and contempt for what Mussolini was trying to do, for better or worse, to contain the growing arrogance of his ally to some extent and influence his political choices.

Apart from a few isolated cases, mainly involving minor figures, it was not until the early months of 1943 that most of the traditional Fascist *leadership* began to emerge from this state of passivity.

which at the time could only be described as unrealistic. Even the vote of July 25 would have been—as we shall see—for the majority of the members of the Grand Council who voted for Grandi's motion, more than a truly conscious act, the result of the direction of some of them, and in particular of Grandi. This attitude explains or contributes to explaining various other aspects of Italian and Fascist reality from the end of 1940 onwards. It explains, for example, why these men were gradually abandoned even by some of their personal friends and loyal supporters (typical cases being Anfuso and Pavolini with regard to Ciano) who, disgusted by their behavior, became their implacable adversaries; and, more generally, the hostility that a large part of the youthful "new fascism" had shown towards them even before the RSI. Finally, as regards its many consequences, at least one must be highlighted: the proliferation of rumors and indiscretions about real and alleged conflicts between the various organs of the regime and between the power groups, the currents within it, about its dysfunctions, corruption, scandals, on imminent changes in the government and at the top of the party, on initiatives and contacts that this or that fascist exponent had attempted or established with the most diverse 'internal opponents' (military, economic and financial figures, declared anti-fascists), etc. Although there were ups and downs depending on the progress of the war for the Axis, this drumbeat of rumors and indiscretions (which almost always originated or filtered, depending on the case, in Rome, from where they spread to other locations and sometimes ended up being broadcast throughout the country by British and Swiss radio stations, with the seal of authenticity that this gave them among many Italians) would not have stopped since the end of 1940 and would have greatly contributed to further muddying the waters of the regime and giving the country and the Germans an image of its crisis even more serious than that which - once the most dramatic moment had passed - was, contributing massively to the depression of the Italian people and the growth among them of discredit and intolerance towards the regime and among the Germans of irritation, contempt, and distrust towards the regime and the Italians in general.

If we then think back to Monsignor Bartolo-Masi's statement, mentioned earlier, Masi, still in June 1943, according to which the morale of soldiers, especially those in operational areas, was higher than that of the metropolitan population, it is natural to wonder whether this was not partly due to the fact that those at the front did not experience, or experienced much less, the climate that had developed in Italy due to the collapse of the regime.

Three considerations contribute to this question. *First*. Apart from individual episodes, common to all armies, there were major cases of desertion of entire units, even in very difficult conditions, not to say

desperate (as in Tunisia, where Italian units fought to the end and better than the German ones), there were none before the Allied landing in Sicily, that is, before defeat appeared inevitable and imminent to everyone, and among the military, especially the Army - which, for the most part, on the one hand, was experiencing war for the first time (the behavior of the Air Force, which had been in the breach for years, was quite different), on the other hand, had always remained in Italy and were therefore part of the discontent and demoralization that had long characterized national life, and, on yet another hand, were partly natives of the island - the natural desire to save their own lives and reach their families took over. *Second*. Cases of self-harm and desertion were much less numerous in the first three years of the war than in 1915-18. An examination of reports to the military judiciary, trials held by military courts, and related documentation shows that deserters during the Greek campaign were fewer in number than has been said and written: of 3,395 reports of desertion and abandonment of post, 3,114 concerned Albanian soldiers and only 211 Italian soldiers and 70 Italian militarized personnel. As for the other fronts: although desertion (most of the complaints for this offense were subsequently reclassified as delayed return to the corps) and self-harm increased, especially in the second half of 1942 and the first half of 1943, they remained within physiological limits until the invasion of Sicily. However, we consider it particularly significant that the vast majority of cases of desertion occurred in Italy and not in the war zone. *Third*. According to the Carabinieri's monthly reports on troop morale: until the fall of the Tunisian bridgehead, the morale of the officers was generally "good," that of the non-commissioned officers "satisfactory," and that of the troops "high."

Such an attitude can only be explained by taking into account a whole series of specific and general factors; among the latter, the fact that officers were more affected than enlisted personnel by the climate of disintegration of the regime certainly played a significant role. But, in general, it was the military hierarchy that was most affected, in which a sense of perplexity and, even more so, discouragement (which gradually spread to their subordinates) grew stronger and more widespread. The main consequence of this was that they considered defeat inevitable and, therefore, it was appropriate to conserve their forces as much as possible, especially the best ones. (it is characteristic in this sense that, with the sole exception of those sent to the Russian front, for which it was necessary to draw on the 'reserve' that was in Italy, the troops sent overseas were never the best), not to take excessive risks, to lean mainly towards the defensive and to engage only when conditions were definitely favorable. This attitude was militarily absurd, because, as Mockler rightly observed: "an army that believes it is on the verge of defeat is more than halfway to defeat," and also politically self-defeating, because it exacerbated the Germans' mistrust and suspicion and thus contributed to Berlin's conviction that aid to Italy should be limited to what was necessary to prevent its collapse. From this perspective, to give just one example, we certainly believe that the proposal made in February 1941 by General Gazzera to the Duke of Aosta, and rejected by the latter, to ask Mussolini for authorization to negotiate an armistice for the Empire² should be considered.

As we have already mentioned, it was in this situation, brought about by the failure of the attack on Greece and further aggravated by the defeats at Taranto and then in North Africa, that Mussolini decided to abandon, for the time being, almost all the operations through which he had, more or less clearly depending on the case, intended to achieve the totalitarianization of the regime, but, at the same time, to press ahead with the two concerning the bureaucracy and the party which, in light of what was happening in the regime, must have appeared to him to be absolutely urgent and necessary, even regardless of the more general context of the realization of complete fascist totalitarianism.

In the previous volume, we saw how, towards the end of July, before the military situation deteriorated, Alfieri tried to probe Mussolini about the reasons for his "loneliness" and suggested that "more lively interaction with people" would alleviate his "sadness." Mussolini replied that he had now become accustomed to solitude and that, however sad, he preferred it because it protected him "from intimacy, in which one is never alone in drawing boundaries between oneself and others." This response perfectly captures the psychological regression and state of mind that had increasingly characterized his personality after the conquest of Ethiopia but which was also most likely influenced by his distrust of almost all his "official" collaborators, even contempt in some cases, and, at the same time, a sort of dark awareness that he was neither objectively nor subjectively (i.e., humanly) able to free himself from them and even unable to impose himself on them *face to face*, to resist them as he would have liked. We say this because, while it is true that the new role that Mussolini thought of assigning to the bureaucracy between the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941 had deep roots in him and must have seemed indispensable to him in order to face the crisis of the regime and the inadequacy of the fascist ruling class, everything suggests that his decision must also have been influenced by a strong psychological component: to finally be able to do away with so many people whom he had long since ceased to respect and whose behavior now fully justified his judgment and authorized him to treat them as they deserved. Nor should we underestimate another aspect of Mussolini's personality which, having remained latent for years, came to the fore during the war and influenced more than one of his decisions.

and gradually even on his attitude towards reality; on the one hand, giving him a long-standing confidence in the future that would otherwise be incomprehensible, and on the other, helping to restrain him from initiatives and decisions that his realism, even in moments of greatest confusion, could not help but consider urgent. We refer to the "heretical" component of his personality.

Gaudens Megaro, speaking of Mussolini's collaboration with La Lima in 1908, drew attention to the pseudonym "Vero eretico" (True Heretic) he used in most of these articles, noting that they also dealt with topics concerning socialism and not only the Church and Catholics and that, therefore, they were not only an

months of 1912 - Mussolini, although no longer an obscure and somewhat picturesque socialist from Romagna and on the verge of becoming *the new Vuo-mo* of Italian socialism, already felt "a little *dépaycé*" not only in the party but also among his own revolutionary comrades, so far removed from his "religious conception of socialism" and thus ^{"philistine,"} a heretic who perceived the imminent risk that his heresy, his "reform," would be killed off by the party and who perhaps already thought of himself as something more than a simple *heretic*, as both a *heretic* and a *corrupter*. A sort of quintessential heretic to whom Mussolini—both as a socialist and as a fascist—would make vague references in the following years, except in one case, in April 1920, when, taking his cue from a controversy between L'Avanti! and Francesco Ciccotti, he went to great lengths to explain what, in particular, he meant by *corruptor*.

Every collective movement, whether social or religious, has orthodox members who want to preserve it in its rigid essential form, encapsulating it in immutable dogma to prevent deviations. Opposite the orthodox, who appear to be the jealous guardians of the movement's static nature, are the heretics, who rise up in the attitude of destroyers, renegades, and anticipators. But their antithesis does not affect the masses, who are misoneists and, out of instinct for self-preservation, settle as long as possible into the believed truth. The heretics, from the outside, render a valuable service to orthodoxy in a certain sense. Between these two forces—both useful in the game of historical events, the first to the masses, the second to individuals, and which influence each other—arises the force of the corrupters, that is, those who introduce, almost surreptitiously, in small but daily doses, the poison of heresy into the body of orthodoxy. The task of the "corrupters" - an underground, complex, delicate task, based on nuances - it results in a utility common to orthodoxy and heresy. Without the "corrupters," heresy would remain condemned to the glorious limbo of individuality, without repercussions among the masses; and, on the other hand, without the corrupters, orthodoxy could fall—paradoxical as it may seem—due to "excessive staticity."

Both a *heretic* and a *corrupter*, he must have always considered himself as such, especially during the most difficult moments of his life, in 1914, in 1919, in 1921, in 1924-25, when he resorted to his charisma as a *heretic* who had foreseen events and banished heresy and who alone was able to ensure its prestige, its credibility among the masses and, therefore, their loyalty to it, and together with his abilities as a *corrupter* who simultaneously introduced elements of heresy into the new orthodoxy in order to save it and make it proceed beyond what appeared to others to be insurmountable pillars of Hercules.

In the years when the main problem was to *endure*, the "heretical" component of Mussolini's personality had no opportunity to manifest itself other than in entirely marginal forms and measures. However, after the war in Ethiopia, once the *totalitarian shift* had begun, it is likely that it had begun to regain momentum. We say this thinking both about why and how Mussolini had to conceive certain aspects of the shift itself, and above all about the underlying spirit that animated it, namely Mussolini's intimate conviction that he was creating a form of totalitarianism that was not only new and different from existing ones, worthy of Italian "civilization" and "mission," but also capable of *corrupting* Nazism. Having banned heresy and led it to victory, Mussolini must have felt the need to corrupt its orthodoxy, becoming the herald of a new heresy within heresy itself with his totalitarianism, in order to prevent it from falling into a state of stagnation that would have precluded the possibility of its natural further extension to other national communities and, above all, would have made National Socialist Germany the hegemonic center, the Vatican, of totalitarian orthodoxy and condemned Fascist Italy, objectively much less powerful, to a condition of subordination to it. However, we are certain of the importance that the "heretical" component emerged in him with the deterioration of the international situation in the summer of 1939 and spring of 1940 and, with the failure of the attack on Greece, of the domestic situation, and, gradually, in his way of facing the reality of war, became increasingly a mixture of extreme realism and extreme confidence in his own "corruptive" abilities. His attitude towards the outbreak of the regime's crisis between the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941 is significant from this point of view.

The need to assign new and more precise tasks to senior bureaucrats He had been thinking for some time about the need to reform the party and public administration in general and to resolve the fundamental issue of the party's role in the regime. At least since he had realized that the traditional fascist ruling class, so to speak, the men of the "revolution," had either settled into a position of defending their power and privileges to the bitter end, or were incapable and afraid of keeping up, or even had ideas about the future of the regime that often differed from his own, and that what should have been *his* true ruling class, the expression of *his* youth, was struggling to take shape, often failing to live up to his expectations and encountering strong resistance from the old fascists to cede the levers of power to them. Starace's removal from the leadership of the PNF was a first sign of his willingness to begin to break the deadlock on the party side. Apart from the glaring error of choosing Muti, as mentioned above, who made

Even those who had breathed a sigh of relief at Starace's dismissal, and even those who had worked for it and who had created a situation within the party such that his successor would end up being another Starace, such as ^{Serena}, regretted Starace's departure. However, the problem was much more complex, and it is difficult to believe that Mussolini did not understand that changing the party secretary meant very little. It could be a "signal," it could be a preparatory step on the road to dismantling the power of old fascism, struck in one of its strongest groups, but nothing more.

During eighteen years of fascist power and fifteen years of regime, the ruling class had donned the orbace, and not only out of opportunism, but it had not changed much, certainly much less than Mussolini would have liked. Even where the greatest changes had taken place, in its more strictly political sphere, these had occurred mainly in the early years, after which the turnover had been gradually more modest and more apparent than substantial. And, broadly speaking, the same can be said, except for the slightly different timing, for its political-administrative sphere. In the absolute absence of studies on the ruling class during the Fascist period, it may be useful to give a few examples.

In 1913, the average age of deputies was 50, in 1919 it was 46, and in 1921 it was 45, partly thanks to the contribution of the fascists, who were generally among the youngest. In 1924, it had fallen by another two points, again thanks to those elected on the two fascist lists (average age 42), which also included many supporters, often elderly. After that, and precisely in completely fascist chambers, it first remained stable (43 for deputies elected in 1929) and then began to rise again, in contrast to all the proposals for rejuvenation and all the declarations of wanting to 'make way for the young'. With the 1934 elections, it had settled at 45, rising to 48 in the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations. The number of former deputies re-elected is also indicative: 49.50 percent in 1929 and as much as 62.75 percent in 1934. Nor should we be misled by its decline to 38.97 percent in the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, given the completely different criteria for the composition of this assembly compared to previous ones. In addition to the lack of rejuvenation and turnover, there was also an even more unbalanced representation than in the past in terms of large regional subdivisions. As can be seen from the first of the tables below, deputies from the North constituted the largest group throughout the regime and, more importantly, were closer to the corresponding average of the population represented at the national level.

^{le1}; those originating from the South and the Islands, on the other hand, suffered a progressive decline until they settled in the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations at an average of more than 11 points lower than that of the populations represented; all to the advantage of those from the center, who continued to increase in number and strongly overrepresented their regions; these were the regions that had given rise to at least two of the most important "pre-war" fascist movements, those of Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, and which included Rome with its large and growing concentration of power around the government and the party. The same substantial staticity was found (except for senators, whose numbers continued to decline) in the government: the average age of ministers and undersecretaries in Mussolini's ministries underwent only a limited decline, while its composition with respect to the major regional subdivisions was essentially characterized by a strong penalization of the South and especially of the Islands.

As for the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, a twofold distinction must be made: between the more political (Interior and Foreign Affairs) and the more technical, and between the new, more strictly fascist ministries (Corporations, Popular Culture and, essentially, Italian Africa) and the traditional ones or those created on the basis of and with personnel drawn essentially from these (Trade and Currency and War Production). In the traditional technical ministries, the level of high-level bureaucracy remained high overall, in contrast to the lower-middle level, which was heavily affected, on the one hand, by the exodus of many of the best officials to private employment, public bodies, parallel administrations, and the liberal professions and, on the other hand, by the decline in the social status and cultural preparation of new officials, who were attracted to public administration much more than by the idea of being able to perform a socially (or politically) useful function, by the security of a "permanent job," and by the direct or indirect benefits guaranteed to them by the regime Greater

Table i.

Deputies (figures in italics indicate percentages).

Legislature	North	Center	Constituenci s 0 seats			Age		
			South	Islands	Total	min	max	average
XXIV (Elections 1913)	227	83	134	64	508	30	83	50

Origin					Former Deputies
North	Center	South	Islands	Abroad	
221	84	132	59	12	
43.30	6.54	23.99	11.61		70.47
219	88	132	68	1	182
43.22	27.32	23.99	23.39	0.19	33.82
244	89	136	66	-	330
45.61	16.64	23.42	22.33		6.68
22	11	4	-	-	2
39.46	29.73	10.81			3.40
222	78	132	66	-	328
44.38	23.66	26.30	23.26		63.86
232	106	122	71	4	249
43.37	29.81	22.80	23.27	0.73	46.34
152	80	92	46	4	129
40.64	22.39	24.60	22.30	2.07	34.30
80	26	30	25	-	120
49.69	26.13	28.63	23.33		74.33
160	99	92	43	6	198
40.00	24.73	23.00	20.73	2.30	49.30
160	77	81	37	5	251
40.00	29.23	20.25	9.23	2.23	62.75
284	204	115	46	13	258
42.90	30.81	27.37	6.93	2.97	56.97

Table 2.

Governments (figures in italics indicate percentages).

	Members Government	Age			Origin		
		min	max	med	North	Center	South
March 21, 1914 (Salandra)	I2 ^a	49	74	62	5 <i>41.66</i>	3 <i>25.00</i>	3 <i>25.00</i>
August 1, 1922 (Facta)	16	40	69	54	5 <i>31.25</i>	4 <i>25.00</i>	4 <i>25</i>
October 31, 1922 (Mussolini)	i6 ^b	3i	63	48	1 <i>62.50</i>	1 <i>6.2</i>	2 <i>22.50</i>
September 13, 1929 (Mussolini)	M ^c	33	63	47	9 <i>64.30</i>	2 <i>24.28</i>	3 <i>21.42</i>
November 1, 1939 (Mussolini)	17 ^d	36	63	46	6 <i>35.29</i>	6 <i>35.30</i>	3 <i>27.65</i>
July 25, 1943 (Mussolini)	18	4i	65	5	9 <i>50.00</i>	4 <i>22.22</i>	4 <i>22.22</i>

Table 3.

Prefects in office (figures in italics indicate percentages).

	Provinces					Age		
	North	Center	South	Islands	Total	min	max	Average
March 21, 1914	30 <i>43.48</i>	14 <i>20.29</i>	16 <i>23.29</i>	9 <i>23.04</i>	69	46	70	58
April 1, 1924	36 <i>47.37</i>	14 <i>28.42</i>	17 <i>22.37</i>	9 <i>12.84</i>	76	41	68	54
October 1, 1929	42 <i>45.65</i>	19 <i>20.65</i>	19 <i>20.65</i>	12 <i>23.05</i>	92	31	59	48

	Origin Deputies then		Non Islands	
	Foreign parliamentarians	Senators National		
1	-	8	4	-
8.34		66.67	35.35	
2	1	13	3	-
22.50	6.25	81.25	18.75	
3	-	12	4	-
28.75		75.00	25.00	
-	-	ME	3	1
		7.45	22.42	7.5
-	2	16	1	-
	22.75	94.7 ^M	5.90	
-	1	17	1	-
	5.56	94.44	5.56	

^a Salandra, President of the Council and Minister of the Interior.

^b Including the undersecretaries of the ministries of Foreign Affairs and the Interior, which were headed by Mussolini.

^c Including the undersecretary at the Ministry of the Interior, headed by Mussolini.

^d Including the undersecretaries of the Ministries of the Interior, War, Navy, and Air Force, headed by Mussolini.

^e Including the undersecretaries of the ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior, War, the Navy, and the Air Force, which were headed by Mussolini.

	Origin				Extra Career
	North	Center	South	Islands	
39		4	18	8	-
56.52		5.8	26.09	22.59	

Table 4.
Diplomatic representatives at headquarters (figures in italics indicate percentages).

	Residences	Age			Origin		
		min	max	med	North	Center	South
March 21, 1914	40	40	64	51	21	6	7
					<i>52.5</i>	<i>15.00</i>	<i>27.5</i>
April 1, 1924	46	41	66	50	24	11	4
					<i>52.18</i>	<i>23.91</i>	<i>8.70</i>
October 1, 1929	48	30	61	48	19	14	11
					<i>39.5^</i>	<i>29.27</i>	<i>22.92</i>
June 1940	51	41	60	50	18	13	15
					<i>35&gt;30</i>	<i>25.49</i>	<i>29.42</i>

Origin		Nobility	Family Diplomats	Extra career
Islands	Foreign			
3 7.30	3 7>^o	27 67.30	2 3>.oo	5 22.30
5 10.87	2 4.34	25 34.33	5 10.87	3 6.32
3 6.25	1 2.08	22 43	5 20.42	4 8.33
4 7.84	1 2.96	15 29.42	7 23.72	4 7.84
5 23.81	1 4.76	5 23.81	2 9.32	2 9.32

Although the reform of the bureaucracy was still less than he would have liked, Mussolini, as a good follower of Michels in this regard, was convinced that bureaucracies were by their very nature the support of governments and that their "opportunism" could be kept in check and, in any case, that in his specific case it was less dangerous than that of many exponents of the regime, in whom he had already lost confidence, if not distrusted, even before the Greek affair. His experiences with the leading figures of the state administration, the presidents of the Court of Auditors and the Council of State, the state's chief accountants, and technicians of the stature of Beneduce, Guarneri, Azzolini, *grand-commis* such as Giannini, but also with many 'simple' directors-general and cabinet chiefs had reinforced this conviction and led him to believe that, all things considered, the regime would function better, and he personally would have collaborators who were not only more efficient but also less politically ambitious and ideologically driven if he worked 'directly with the bureaucracy' and if it were the bureaucracy rather than the politicians who held the reins. The compor-

The defeat of many of these and the crisis of the regime caused by the defeats at the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941 were therefore only the final push—and at the same time the opportunity—to launch an "experiment" that he had been thinking about for some time and which, at this point, must have seemed urgent to him for a number of other reasons: 0) to avert the danger that the "opportunism" of the bureaucracy might lead it to distance itself from the regime as well; b) to warn the hierarchs, remove them from Rome and their machinations, and silence their "vociferations"; and c) to give some satisfaction to that large section of public opinion that saw them, and especially Ciano, as the main culprits of the attack on Greece and, in general, of its mistakes; d) to give some satisfaction to the Germans and to silence the sovereign who, acting as an interpreter of the General "discontent" towards Ciano, he had not hidden from him that he considered his replacement appropriate, a step that he did not want to take at that moment, believing that - done under "coercion" - it would backfire on him both politically (in relations with Berlin and with the sovereign) and personally (in relations with his daughter Edda). Finally, another fact cannot be underestimated. Although convinced of the wisdom of his decision to govern with the bureaucracy and of the reasons that made it urgent and necessary at that moment, Mussolini must still have had some doubts about the soundness of his own recipe and, in any case, he must have feared that resorting to such a radical and unprecedented solution at such a difficult time would not be understood, would cause further confusion and negative reactions in the country, and would create new problems for him, primarily with the traditionalism and formalism of Victor Emmanuel III, who, if anything, would have preferred a government of technocrats.

This logic explains the otherwise incomprehensible decision by Mussolini in the first half of January to suddenly send many high-ranking officials, almost all ministers, and numerous undersecretaries to the front. This order caused perplexity within the party and lively protests from many of those directly involved, especially the ministers, with whom Mussolini generally behaved in an extremely brusque manner, ordering them to take up their duties immediately, without receiving them for a farewell visit or even to report on current ministerial activities, and showing himself to be anything but cordial to the very few he did receive (except for Gorla, not

case the only minister who was more technical than ^{political}), and who, once again, provoked more criticism and perplexity than approval in public opinion, since it appeared to most to be a clumsy maneuver to relaunch fascism and the "warrior spirit" of the *suongerarchs*, and had no impact on the attitude of the fascist elite, if, indeed, it did not give them new reasons and pretexts for criticism. This explains why Mussolini, who was already considering the possibility of establishing the position of secretary general in all ministries, evidently with the intention of making them responsible for the management of the various departments, made no mention of the reform he had been considering, limiting himself to telling Serena, who had expressed doubts about the advisability of calling up so many officials, that he wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to conduct, by working directly with the bureaucracy, "an interesting experiment in government." An "experiment" on which he had to focus to such an extent that, when in mid-February he realized that the absence of the incumbents was causing a slowdown in activity and a series of inconveniences that were far from insignificant in some ministries, so he had to bow to the need to appoint four deputy undersecretaries. His choices (about which he was careful not to consult the respective incumbents) fell on four senior senators and technicians, and their appointment, in the official communiqué, was justified by the absence of the respective ministers "on duty at the front." but this explanation was accompanied by a clarification that revealed that at that time he had no intention of interrupting the 'experiment' and, on the contrary, wanted to continue it indefinitely: the appointment of the four undersecretaries was limited 'to the period of war'.

Contrary to his intentions, once operations against Greece had concluded, Mussolini found himself forced to put an end to his "experiment." Several reasons contributed to this decision: the storm of criticism it had provoked among the regime's leadership, the impatience and pressure of those involved, eager to return to Italy and resume their positions; the inconveniences to which the "experiment" had given rise and, above all, we believe, the fact that those who had gained the most from it were the party that had taken advantage of it to extend its power: a result that Mussolini had not foreseen at all and that contrasted with all his intentions. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that by putting an end to it he had definitively renounced his idea. There are various facts that support such a statement. First of all, his persistence in maintaining a "cold and almost hostile attitude" towards the hierarchs, which can only be partly explained by the contempt he had for almost all of them and whose moods, criticisms, underground maneuvers and maneuvers, ambitions and impotence, and fears he knew well, to which the "happy" conclusion of the war in Greece had not in the least put an end to. Then there was his attempt to have as little contact with them and also with those who held ministerial positions as possible beyond those of strict *routine* (Council of Ministers meetings and periodic "tabular" reports), which were generally quick and brief, in which he was the main speaker, communicating his particular decisions and general assessments. This behavior cannot be attributed solely to his increasingly pronounced tendency to withdraw into himself and minimize contact with others, even those with whom he had long-standing relationships and who did not hold political office. On the one hand, he kept his ministers in a state of isolation to see and hear them as little as possible and increasingly resorted to the practice (which became almost an "institution") of "notes for the Duce," through which they had to submit their proposals and observations on the various issues on the table and which he almost always returned to them with a curt 'yes' or 'no' and his approval or, much more rarely, with some notes written on his instructions by his private secretary: on the other hand, he did not neglect at all to

follow the various issues with methodical consistency, so much so that even Ciano, despite criticizing him everywhere and with everyone and saying that "sometimes" he was

"a little out of touch with reality," he had to admit that he was "always calm, attentive, and present to himself."¹ Except that he preferred to follow and deal with them personally, bypassing ministers and undersecretaries and dealing instead with the directors-general within the various administrations. This tendency, as has been said, had always been present (albeit to varying degrees and in different ways depending on the circumstances and the nature of the issues) in his way of managing government affairs, but now, despite having had to put an end to the "experiment" of governing with the directors-general, he did not give it up at all and, on the contrary, emphasized, not realizing that in doing so he not only undermined the credibility and authority of ministers in the eyes of the bureaucracy, but also conferred on the directors-general an authority and independence that Giuriati, in his last letter written to him a few days before July 25, would not have hesitated to describe as "pernicious to the state." And they were all the more so as they passed from the directors-general—partly due to the logic of the mechanism, partly due to the personal interest of those who wanted to cut themselves a slice or, at least, gather the crumbs—to the lower ranks of the bureaucratic apparatus. This brings us back to the situation and problems that De Stefani had already denounced towards the end of 1941 and which he defined in 1943 as the main cause of the regime's internal crisis.

As soon as they became leaders, they proved to be honest and convinced defenders of those whom they themselves had previously wanted to execute.

High-level bureaucracy is not fearsome simply because it is not fascist, but above all because it dominates—through its experience and through its subtle and often specious interpretation of the law—over people and therefore over the affairs of the Regime.

Such a violent *reaction* suggests that Scorza feared Mussolini would raise serious objections and resistance, and therefore leads us to believe that he knew nothing about any "repentance" on the part of the "Duce." Nor does this seem certain to us, even on the basis of the speech of June 24. In fact, although Mussolini agreed with Scorza overall, not only did he use less violent tones than him, but, more importantly, he gave the impression that he was trying to limit the scope of the accusations and, therefore, of the measures requested by the party secretary. While Scorza, in his "note" of June 7, had targeted the "high bureaucracy" as a whole, he referred only to the directors-general. Nor does it appear that he did anything in the following days to persuade the Minister of Justice De Marsico not to oppose the project - supported by Scorza and which, it should be noted, concerned not only general directors but also general inspectors - under which, by unquestionable decision of the Council of Ministers, any official from the fifth grade upwards could be compulsorily retired. These two facts, while not proving anything, do support the hypothesis that Mussolini, rather than agreeing with Scorza, gave in to his insistence (which, moreover, corresponded to a widely held view within the party) and that, in seeking to limit its scope, he was motivated not only and not so much by the fear of arousing the hostility of the bureaucratic elite against the regime as by his persistent belief that, despite everything, the bureaucracy was the real strength of the regime.

And now we come to the other issue that Mussolini felt the need to address as a result of the crisis caused by the military defeats in Greece and North Africa.

In previous volumes, we have discussed at length the relationship between Mussolini and the PNF, how he came to conceive of the relationship between the state and the party and the functions of the latter, as well as his psychological attitude towards it. It therefore seems superfluous to revisit the issue *from scratch*, especially since, during the period in question, it was influenced by these precedents, but also, and no less strongly, by the situation caused by the war and the crisis of the regime in particular. Thus, rather than focusing on the elements of continuity, it seems appropriate to emphasize those of novelty, so as to better focus on Mussolini's position and, at the same time, avoid the risk of getting bogged down in political science reconstructions rather than historical ones.

rico, limiting ourselves to referring to what has already been said about Mussolini's program of totalitarianism and the role that the party was supposed to play within it. This is all the more so given that, at first glance, it might seem that during those years the 'Duce' was essentially uninterested in the party, initially limiting himself to taking pleasure in its constant quantitative growth without realizing that behind its imposing facade there was actually very little substance, then to making generic statements about its irreplaceable role in an attempt to revive what remained of fascism and to mobilize the party *in extremis* against the "lukewarm," the "disillusioned," and the "traitors."

This impression is supported by an undoubtedly true fact, namely that in his public speeches or in the reports of those reported in the press in 1940-42, Mussolini either did not mention the party or limited himself to vague references, but which, equally undoubtedly, this has no value, given the particular (that of Adriano) or official (the two in the Chamber of Fascist Corporations) nature of those speeches and given that the reports and excerpts that appeared in the press also responded to a particular logic that excluded positions that contrasted with the image of the internal situation and of the party that they wanted to convey. In reality, as soon as operations against Greece began to go badly and to have repercussions on the domestic front, Mussolini began to take a closer interest in the party, which until then he had left almost entirely in the hands — so to speak — of Muti and then of the acting secretary Capoferri, even though he was not satisfied with them either, as evidenced by the fact that Serena's appointment was decided before the attack on Greece.

With Starace out of the way, the task of his successors should have been to 'destaracise' the party and begin to renew and rejuvenate its leadership. However, neither Muti nor Capoferri had done much in this regard. The mammoth and cumbersome bureaucratic-organisational machine in which Starace had constrained and sterilised the life of the party had been undermined almost exclusively in words. In fact, Muti and Capoferri had continued their predecessor's policy of extending the party's non-political powers, developing its dependent organizations, and constantly increasing its membership, not only through the mechanism of "fascist conscription," but also by reopening membership to those who, "due to circumstances beyond their control" or objective difficulties, had not applied at the time, and effectively renouncing any intention of "selecting" old members (and, in practice, new ones too) on the basis of the dual conviction that, in the face of the ordeal of war and the

duties that it entailed, patriotism and fascism would silence all other sentiments and thus put an end to the vast majority of inappropriate behavior, and that in pursuing the most serious cases, care must be taken not to damage the party's image because of a few unworthy individuals. Something more had been done in terms of renewing the leadership: a good number of federal officials in office at the time of Starace's removal had been replaced; thirty-seven of them would no longer have been able to lead a federation even under Serena, Vidussoni, and Scorza. As can be seen from the tables on the following pages, among the newcomers, in addition to the 1929 generation, there was an increase in young people from the 'fascist generation' and, above all, those appointed for the first time. Overall, however, the average age of federal officials had risen by two years compared to the approximately 37.5 years of the last period of Starace's secretariat. Finally, in terms of regional origin, the federation members continued to represent the 'pre-war' areas, the North and the Center (which had actually significantly improved its presence), while the South and, above all, the Islands had lost quite a few positions to their advantage.

Although, as we have said, he was not satisfied with what Muti and Capoferri had done for the party, the first indications that Mussolini gave to the national leadership on November 18 concerned only indirectly the internal situation of the PNF, but rather that of the country, which was much more worrying at that time. Faced with the crisis on the home front, the party had to "intensify to the maximum all forms of its activity," which had suffered "a certain slowdown" in previous months, due, he said, to the mobilization of "all the hierarchs." This explanation corresponded only minimally to the truth, and we believe that Mussolini resorted to it in order to justify in some way the failure of Muti's management and, at the same time, himself for having made such an unfortunate choice and for not having promptly replaced Muti *in full*, thus weakening the position of Capoferri, who was already ill-suited to leading the party, having mainly trade union experience behind him. In his speech, Mussolini clearly indicated what he wanted the PNF to focus on at that moment:

The party, he said, must free itself and free the nation from the surviving petty-bourgeois ballast, in the broadest sense of the term. It must maintain and accentuate the climate of hard times, reach out to the people more and better than before, protecting their moral health and material welfare.

Certainly, pacifism^ with its cerebral and universalistic background must be carefully monitored and combated. And debunked, at least as far as this age of iron and cannons is concerned. Nothing else exists or should exist outside the supreme purpose for which we are armed.

Only five and a half months later, after the Greek affair had ended, speaking on May 4, 1941, to the directors of the Federation and the Fascio of Milan, he addressed the issue of purging party members who "do not live in our atmosphere"¹:

All those who dig themselves into holes, who show that they do not have very strong faith, who give negative impressions with their attitudes, must be eliminated. These are people who do not want to be disturbed, who want eternal peace, so that their peace is not disturbed. They are a real burden, which is better to lose than to acquire. It is clear that all these people must be found in a specific area, which is not the working-class area, no, which has behaved in a truly exemplary manner. It is in the area of those who are well off... We racked our brains to define what this bourgeoisie is. I have come up with a definition that I consider definitive in a certain sense, however dangerous definitions may be: the bourgeoisie is that person who is well-off and cowardly. The man who was once called wealthy and who combines money with personal cowardice. And here is that subtle and dangerous enemy that is the bourgeoisie.

And with it, he also addressed the issue of revising the party's leadership:

If the officers are courageous, strong, and have a high sense of responsibility, the troops will be magnificent. If, on the other hand, the officers do not have these qualities, the troops cannot perform as expected. Extreme caution is required when selecting officers, especially junior officers. It must be remembered that it is the platoon leader who decides the outcome of the battle, as it depends on him whether the team or company moves forward, stops, or turns back. Party cadres must always be made up of platoon leaders (I use this military expression) who must truly possess the required qualities, must be in contact with the people, speak to the people in a calm, precise language, free from demagogic overtones, because we have always refused to promise easy paradises. Guaranteed work, fair wages, decent housing, an old age in which one does not have to suffer. For us, this is the shortening of social distances. We cannot promise anything else, because we could not do anything else.

Given these commitments, it is hardly surprising that Serena and his main collaborators engaged in a whole series of activities and initiatives which, as we have seen, due to their intrusiveness and populism, produced almost nothing but failures and sparked a whole series of conflicts and controversies with the state bodies responsible for dealing with issues that the party wanted to take over for itself, or at least, have them dealt with according to its criteria. All this was aggravated by the fact that as statisticians at heart, they claimed to control everything and everyone, to formalize as much as possible the interventions and functions they had assigned themselves.

Main characteristics of the federal secretaries of the PNF (October 1, 1939 - July 25, 1943).

	Age													
	26-29		30		35		40		45-49		over 50		average age	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	n.	%	n	%	n	%	years	months
October 31, 1939 (Starace)	3	3.19	25	26.60	37	39.37	23	24.46	3	3.19	3	3.19	37	5
June 1940 (Muti)														
October 30, 1940 (Muti-Capoferri)	7	7.44	17	18.09	28	29.79	29	30.86	1	10.63	3	3.19	38	M E
December 26, 1941 (Serenà)	5	5.3i	18	19.05	24	25.54	31	32.98	12	12.77	4	4.25	39	5

Party seniority								
The •919%	1920		1921		1922 AM	1922 PM	post 1922	LF
	n.	%	n.	96	No. 96	No. 96	No. 96	No. 96

Regional origin.

Piedmont		Lombardy		Liguria		Trentino		Veneto		Friuli- Venezia Giulia Istria	
8.26 •		3.77		3.46		1.8		8.41		2.61	
n	%	n	%	No.	%	n	%	n	%	n	%

Emilia Romagna		Marche		Tuscany		Umbria		Lazio		Abruzzo and Molise	
7.88		3.02		<u>7.88</u>		<u>8.70</u>		6.26		<u>3.75</u>	
n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
12	12.77	6	6.38	8	8.51	3	3.19	6	6.38	3	3.9
15	15.96	6	6.38	ME	10.63	5	5.3i	9	9.57	4	4.25
14	M,90	5	5.3i	11	11.71	4	4.25	11	n,7i	4	4.25
13	13.82	5	5.3i	9	9.57	5	5.3i	8	8.51	2	2.12
9	9.57	4	4.25	8	8.51	4	4.25	7	7.44	4	4.25
12	12.77	2	2.12	8	8.51	2	2.12	4	4.25	4	4.25
75	13.30	28	4.97	54	9.58	23	4.08	45	7.98	21	3.72

• The figures indicate the percentage of the population counted in the 1936 census.

Foreign		North		Center		South		Islands	
-		45.97		18.00		24.16		11.87	
No.	%	No.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%

("If I hadn't opposed it," ^{Mussolini} said on June 24, 1943, "at a certain point, even those who were in bars serving drinks in the Dopolavoro clubs would have become public officials... ") and resorting to measures that were as useless as they were oppressive and - as we have already seen - even violent: so that, instead of "reaching out to the people" and securing their consent, the PNF achieved the opposite result and increased the discredit that already surrounded it and, with it, that of the regime. Not to mention the bureaucracy which, due to the failure of the politicians already mentioned, the confusion caused by the more or less impromptu initiatives and mistakes of the party, which it had to remedy and which, in the eyes of the people, credited it as one of the structures - despite all its limitations - that was still reliable and capable of finding, in the maze of various laws, regulations, and provisions, a way to resolve or circumvent issues and situations involving interests of the most varied nature and extent, from the smallest but vital for a large number of Italians, to the very large ones of the economic and speculative powers, it was precisely during Serena's administration that he laid the true foundations of his power, with all the consequences that this entailed for the authority, efficiency, and credibility of the regime. So it is difficult not to agree with what Fanno, after Carlo Ravasio, would note in his diary:

In reality, it is not fascism that governs, but bureaucracy, which, under any government, has only one party: its own, unique and eternal, the bureaucratic party. It makes and then unmakes or modifies laws: if they are good, they are its own; if they are bad, they are those wanted by the minister, and it proposes to the next minister to modify or annul them; in this way it wins their trust because every minister, as we know, wants to leave his mark. This is the case, for example, with the laws on food supplies: the north must apply them, but the south, where the bureaucracy has its interests, can ignore them... Thus Sicily, which was once the breadbasket of Italy, is now in deficit.

Nor, as far as can be understood given the extreme scarcity of documentation on the subject, were Serena's results in

within its direct competence,"¹ participating in the life of the country² and its own ("it is not enough to have paid the membership fee and participate in meetings"³) and, therefore, able to work in depth and intensify and accelerate its fundamental activities, "first and foremost those of a political and spiritual nature," then those related to welfare and trade unions and to issues of stockpiling and prices, without, however, creating useless and harmful duplications of state organizations and taking initiatives, such as market inspections, that were not part of its tasks. A party, again, and this was what mattered most to Mussolini, that responded to the expectations of Fascist youth, opened its ranks to them at all levels, and handed over command to them. That a serious "process of selection and individual discrimination" would cause the party to lose "even three or four hundred thousand" members, even a million, was not important; the important thing was "not to lose the eight million young people who belong to the new generations." As we have already seen, Mussolini would say in March to the Venetian and South Tyrolean federal leaders that the party must now seek quality rather than quantity and avoid crystallizations that would lead to a lethal rift between the generations.

It is unlikely that Mussolini truly considered Vidussoni up to the task. His choice must have fallen on Vidussoni essentially because he was an honest man, a "believer," not tied to any power group, fanatically devoted to him, so that he thought he could guide him by the hand; because he was young (and had what it took to be a fighter) and to manage that kind of transformation of the party, a young man was needed, both to immediately signal the change he intended to bring about and to galvanize the Fascist youth, understand their psychology and problems, and give proper vent and direction to their aspirations; because, ultimately, he did not have another better candidate and absolutely did not want to be forced to accept one, as in the past, from the various power cliques and find himself in the position of having to say no to the candidacies of major figures in the regime who aspired to the party secretariat and whom he no longer respected or considered 'outdated'. Not to mention that he called upon a highly respected *team* to support him as deputy secretaries, composed of

of men with little or no involvement in previous administrations and with the Roman environment: an old fascist like Ennio Barberini (who had commanded the Second Libyan Legion in the previous year), Fernando Mezzasoma (who boasted considerable experience in the Guf, of which he had also been deputy secretary), Augusto Venturi (one of the best and most experienced fascist trade unionists), Mario Farnesi (who was entrusted with the task of head of the political secretariat), a dull man from Trieste, but a good connoisseur of the party machine and a hard worker, who was also peripheral to the Roman camarillas, which in 1943 would accuse him of "Jewish relations," and above all Carlo Ravasio, one of the few men in whom Mussolini still truly trusted and to whom, as he said in the directorate on January 3, 1942, he entrusted the most important and delicate task of "superintendent of the political and moral orthodoxy of the party." Finally, another fact should not be underestimated: until he began to have his first doubts about the wisdom of his decision to appoint Vidussoni and, discouraged, began to reduce his contacts with him (to the point of limiting them almost exclusively to those required by protocol) and even with Ravasio - that is, roughly in May - and subsequently less closely following the life of the party (limiting himself to intervening only in some of the more important meetings of the directorate) and concentrating all his attention on military operations in North Africa, falling back on the idea that, in the final analysis, the real politics was the war and that, once this was won, the party's battle would also be won. From the beginning of January to the end of April 1942, Mussolini summoned all the federal secretaries for groups of regions to report to him. The purpose of the reports was above all to be directly informed of the situation in the country and the party by the peripheral leaders of the PNF themselves and through the least bureaucratic contact possible, allowing him to gauge their moods and the most hidden moods (which did not prevent him from having certain situations checked by Pellizzi who, taking advantage of his travels as president of the National Institute of Fascist Culture, sometimes made sudden inspections in individual federations and then reported back to him); however, they also gave him the opportunity both to reiterate and clarify his ideas and directives to them and to

realize Vidussoni's real ability to interpret and implement it.

In fact, as we have already mentioned, the choice of Vidussoni proved to be a failure second only to that of appointing Muti. Nor did Ravasio's presence remedy Vidussoni's limitations and inexperience. Moreover, the very person who should have been the real linchpin of the secretariat soon ended up having a semi-conflictual relationship with him, which, in November 1942, prompted him to ask to leave his post in the secretariat (but the request was rejected by Mussolini who, as we shall see, had other plans for Ravasio) and which, even before that, had essentially made Farnesi the real secretary of the party. That said, it must also be said that in the situation in which the country and the party found themselves, no one, even someone less inexperienced and with a stronger personality than Vidussoni, could have done much more. Everything and everyone was in fact against the program that Mussolini had entrusted to his young protégé.

We have already discussed the mood of the country, its torpor, its weariness, its concerns about increasingly difficult living conditions, its distrust of the regime, and its intolerance of the party (to which Serena's management had greatly contributed), so we will not return to this topic. At this point in our reconstruction, it is more important to focus on the attitude of the regime and, in particular, its *establishment*.

As all available documentation clearly shows, not only was he taken by surprise by Vidussoni's appointment, but the vast majority immediately took a stand against him. The old fascists were shaken and saw it as "a sign of the abandonment of the 'old guard' of Mussolini"²; the Farinaccians saw it as the failure of their plans to bring one of their own (probably the Milan federal Andrea Ippolito) to the secretariat; Ciano (whom Serena had approached when he began to perceive the risk that the ground might collapse beneath his feet) saw it instead as the end of his ambitions to control the party through an intermediary. The regime's *leadership*, Bottai, Ciano, Farinacci, Host-Venturi, Russo, Volpi, etc., immediately labeled him a "fool" and an "imbecile" and joined in a virtually unanimous chorus to discredit him in every way possible (even for the lack of elegance in his clothing) and prophesy his rapid demise, so much so that Ciano

- who, even at the very beginning, was careful not to appear among the most acrimonious and contemptuous, even though, in any case, he had hastened to...

He made it known that he had played no part in the choice of his successor—less than a week after his appointment, he noted sarcastically:

"It's nice, every now and then, to find a dissident: today Barella stated that Vidussoni's appointment was welcomed with sympathy in the country!"². This led to a proliferation of jokes about Vidussoni ("from book and musket to book and ma-schietto," etc.), slander, and ironic remarks about his "ignorance," his lack of oratory skills, his obvious nervousness when he had to speak in front of Mussolini, the "banality" of some of his statements (Bottai³ would go so far as to call them "Bertoldesque nonsense") and, consequently, criticism of Mussolini for choosing him.

There was undoubtedly some truth in these criticisms. However, the fact that they were unleashed immediately, even before Vidussoni had taken his first steps, clearly shows what was actually behind them. In some cases, it was envy or disappointment at not being in his place, but in most cases, there were much more substantial reasons that make it clear that Mussolini, despite making the wrong choice of man, had, from his point of view, hit the nail on the head and that *the establishment* had understood the danger that the 'little boy' could represent for it and had immediately mobilized against him, that is, against the 'Duce's' plans to clean up the regime and open its doors to young people: for his opponents, sinking Vidussoni meant political survival. Let us be clear: we are not saying that if Vidussoni had been replaced by a man of different temperament and ability, he would have been able to implement Mussolini's program and even put an end to the crisis of the regime and turn the situation around. The situation was now so compromised that nothing could really change it, except, perhaps, a sort of Mussolini-style July 20, which, however, was not in the 'Duce's' nature and which, in any case, he could not have done either because of the differences between the Fascist and Nazi systems of power, or because to do so Mussolini would have needed German cover, and this was at odds with his conception of relations with the ally and, as time went by, with his intentions to press Hitler to review his policy in the East; intentions that, if they had the slightest chance of translating into something concrete, required Mussolini to present himself to Hitler not as a debtor of his own power, but with the old charm of the political "maestro." Nor, for that matter, did Mussolini himself, when he began to lose confidence in Vidussoni and realized the extent of the resistance and hostility that the

progressives and fascists who envisioned a new social order that was more just and appropriate for the times, between fascists who had seized power and fascists who wanted to take it away from them, some to seize it for themselves, others because they considered them unworthy. Although he was at the origin of this struggle, Mussolini, when he realized the extent of the coalition opposed to any change and the risks to which it could expose his power or, at least, his remaining prestige, preferred to watch without taking part explicitly, so that it ended quickly with the defeat of Vidussoni (and, therefore, of Mussolini himself), without, however, formally involving the 'Duce', whom none of the major figures *of the establishment* wanted to see removed at that moment. So much so that, at the end of January 1943, once Vidussoni's removal had been decided, Mussolini could still consider replacing him with Ravasio and, when the latter refused on health grounds, he was able to appoint Carlo Scorza three months later. This choice was certainly not *ideal* from his point of view, but it had two advantages: it was entirely his own, not desired or suggested by others (such as Albini and Bottai), and it was still, to some extent, in line with the perspective that had led him to choose Vidussoni.

On December 5, 1942, Vidussoni sent Mussolini a "note" (as mentioned in the previous chapter) summarizing what the party had done—or rather, had attempted to do—up to that point to implement the instructions it had received and proposing a reorganization of the leadership to make it more functional and capable of keeping the party on the path it had taken. The memo reveals Vidussoni's lack of political acumen.

The party knows no middle ground, does not like discussions of any kind, and does not tolerate doubts or uncertainties. It is time to believe, only to believe.

Hence the conclusion reached by Vidussoni, which motivated his request to reshuffle the composition of the board:

In carrying out this action, faithfully inspired by your general directives, he wrote, it was and still is necessary to give the Party, the repository of your revolutionary creed, an image that is as closely and immediately linked to you, and you alone, as possible. Therefore, it was necessary to break down or at least remove certain barriers, including those of a personal nature, which often kept it substantially, if not formally, disconnected from your direct action.

There is no doubt that controls, influences that are more or less self-serving, and vigilance that is somewhat partisan precisely because it is personal in nature, have led and could still lead the Party to adopt particularistic and therefore inappropriate attitudes.

The Party cannot and must not be an area of influence—if I may say so—of any politician. The Party is you, and all its members must not, through their actions, adopt complacent attitudes that, for reasons of convenience, may be misaligned at the moment of execution.

On this path, which conflicts with certain interests and is unfortunately not always easy, we walk with uncompromising integrity and loyalty. We must now strengthen our organization, consolidate our direction, and achieve ever greater solidarity among our leaders, who can permeate all sectors of national life that are directly and immediately

myths, Vidussoni, after a year of managing the PNF, doubted that he could carry out the renewal of the party on his own and therefore felt the need for a more explicit stance from the "Duce" and, at the same time, a compromise with the more political (not "personalistic") part of old fascism, but did not dare to raise the issue explicitly with Mussolini. Hence his resorting to, his taking refuge behind a convoluted, vague, allusive argument that made it easy for the 'Duce' to simply give the green light to the recovery of part of the old guard, while dropping the 'request' to engage personally in a confrontation that he now had to consider - also due to the worsening military situation - difficult to turn to his advantage and in which, in any case, he would never have engaged, having Vidussoni as party secretary, whose 'cycle' he now considered to be over and who, if Ravasio had proved willing, he would have replaced even earlier than he actually did. One thing is certain: by appointing Vidussoni, Mussolini had wanted to establish *his* party and tackle the internal crisis of the regime; in the year that had passed under Vidussoni's leadership, however, the crisis had worsened in every sense, and the party had not only changed very little and superficially, but had become an even greater and more active factor than before the crisis itself.

The reduction of bureaucracy and disengagement from collateral activities and, consequently, the strengthening of welfare and trade union services, which together should have formed the basis for a new, active presence of the party in the country, had been modest. The same was true for the renewal of the leadership, another fundamental aspect of the whole operation: having federal leaders who were largely personally honest and "of faith" and severely punishing those who 'strayed' was certainly not enough to compensate for the lack of autonomy and opportunity for initiative in which the continuing centralization of the party kept them, just as it was not enough to compensate for the extreme difficulty, not to say impossibility, they had in connecting (and even being informed) with the actual reality of the war; partly because of the centralization of everything in Rome, and partly because of the care that the state administrations, starting with the military and police, took to exclude the party as much as possible - especially in the suburbs - from the flow of information and the development of initiatives and measures to be adopted. Nor can we underestimate the fact that the little that was done in the above areas was done at the expense of activities such as the press, propaganda, the political education of young people and, more generally, their effective connection with the reality of war.

Driven by these concerns, a harsh crackdown took place in May and June, especially in Rome, with numerous arrests of speculators and high-profile defeatists, which sowed panic in the regime's circles and in the *demi-monde* that thrived around it. This was largely attributed to Vidussoni's "fanaticism" and — more importantly — unleashed against him a whole series of discontents and oppositions that had been smoldering under the ashes and had only manifested themselves very partially until then, waiting for an opportune moment to come out into the open. The shock caused by this crackdown is clearly evident in Luca Pietromarchi's diary entry of June 5, 1942:

The purge campaign rages on. Regina Coeli seems to have become Rosati's branch office; aristocrats, speculators, industrialists crowd the cells, and there is nowhere to house the new clientele. They are hoarders of gold and goods, black market traffickers. Every family has someone they know in there. Some merchants, arrested by the tax police for raising prices, have come to negotiate with the police officers themselves and, with the promise of huge sums of money, have tried to hush everything up. Medical officers have trafficked in exemptions. Beautiful women, police spies, lovers, and adventurers are involved in these rapacious gangs.

The Duce has ordered a purge of the Party: the number of members must be reduced from four million to three million. Farinacci opposes this, arguing that it is not the young people at the head of the party who should review the ranks of the old guard.

There is talk of a major ministerial reshuffle. The struggle between old and new fascists rages on. The Party Secretary had revoked the membership card of Varennà, Farinacci's close friend. Farinacci protested to the Duce and got it back.

At the political and party level, an even greater shock had already been caused by a series of measures that had been imposed on various of its representatives or people closely connected with it since the beginning of the year. It is impossible to determine which and how many of these measures originated on the desks of Vidussoni, Farnesi, and Ravasio rather than on Mussolini's; what matters is that they were all or almost all attributed to Vidussoni, even those in which it is almost certain that he had no part. Attributing them to him rather than to the 'Duce' was in fact less risky and could serve to put pressure on Mussolini to dismiss Vidussoni, shifting all responsibility onto his inexperience and 'fanaticism'.

In January, Arturo Osio, the general manager of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, had been replaced. The man was much talked about and col-

linked to circles within the regime that were critical of Mussolini, particularly those close to Farinacci; however, it can be ruled out that Vidussoni played even ^{a marginal} role in his ouster. The "Osio case" was followed by the expulsion from the party, in March, for profiteering, of national councilor Francesco Maria Aproso (PNF representative in the Grain Corporation) and , in April, of the president of the Italian Foreign Trade Company, Vincenzo Faggiuoli. Subsequently, five other national councilors were expelled (as well as being declared disqualified from membership of the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations and sentenced or sent into exile): Gino Franciosi and Francesco Giacomelli (Wood Corporation), Ezio Braga (Fuel Corporation), Umberto Cattania (Extractive Industries Corporation) and - a fact that had widespread repercussions - for 'personal gain' the president of the Confederation of Traders, Giorgio Molfino, who had been federal president of Genoa from 1932 to 1938 and a member of the national executive of the PNF from 1937 to 1939.

In November, the party's axe fell (as well as on a sixth national councilor, Augusto Crò of the Mining Industry Association) on three federal councilors who were suddenly replaced (for inefficiency, as it soon became known): Luigi San Germano of Genoa, Guido Ramaccioni of Palermo, and Andrea of Milan

Ippolito, one of the rising stars of the PNF and member of the national executive committee. Even more than the previous ones, which had already shaken him deeply—to the point of giving rise to public outbursts of anger against "those gentlemen of the party" such as those in which Francesco Giunta had performed in the corridors of Montecitorio: "and let them take away his membership card; he wipes his ass with it," according to a note by Bottai¹ - these measures had alarmed and agitated the old fascism, which saw them as a maneuver to discredit and marginalize it. Based on the available documentation, it seems that the person who was most irritated and concerned was Farinacci, who had long been openly hostile to Vidussoni's policies and in particular to his attitude towards young fascists and their press; What is certain is that while Vidussoni's other opponents preferred to continue to act behind the scenes, Farinacci - who, above all, had to defend his *leadership* over the hardliners and old fascists in general, as well as his image as the only one who spoke plainly to Mussolini - Instead, he chose a frontal attack, probably hoping to induce Mussolini to replace Vidussoni or, at least, to prevent the imminent renewal of the leadership from further weakening the presence of the old fascists at the top of the party.

On November 19 and 20, Farinacci wrote two letters to Mussolini that were a complete indictment of Vidussoni and the party's policy. In the first, he referred to the three dismissals of the previous days, particularly that of San Germano ("the dismissal of the federal leader of Genoa—which took place forty-eight hours after the heavy bombing [of the city]—had blamed the party, in front of Italians and foreigners, for insufficient defensive organization... and Radio London couldn't believe its luck in being able to highlight this episode") and Ippolito ("Ippolito had great qualities: intelligence, energy, organizational skills, effective oratory..."). He used these to accuse Vidussoni of favoring the owls, the legionnaires of Spain, the people of Trieste, and those "who had anything to do with Matera" ("yes, Matera, dear president, has risen to the dignity of an ideal school of Fascist mysticism"), of wanting to "destroy the old and natural hierarchies" and thus playing into the hands of the enemies of Fascism, causing "a serious rift" between old and young, "discrediting" the party and Fascism instead of defending them against their detractors:

What has been done against those who denigrate war, against those who denigrate fascism? Neither fair repression, nor effective propaganda, nor the elimination of the evils and defects that are complained about. Vidussoni and his

collaborators are unable to do this: they lack knowledge of people, situations, and problems. When there is a storm, only a sturdy boat and experienced men can stay afloat. Vidussoni is a good guy, but he's just a guy. The Party Secretary at this moment should be at least an animator, while you know that when he speaks, he creates the opposite effect.

In ^{the} second ^{letter}, he focused instead on the expulsion of national councilors, essentially accusing Vidussoni's administration of picking on the small fish and doing nothing about the big ones:

We are hunting down National Councilors and other fascists who earned tens of thousands of lire in anonymous companies and other entities, and we have lost sight of many bigwigs, such as Beneduce, Paratore, Bevione, Azzolini, etc., etc., who earn fabulous sums, some over a million a year, while retaining their old mentality and considering themselves indispensable. Guarneri, former Minister of Trade and Currency, a native of Cremona and a priest at heart, has amassed a collection of lucrative positions since leaving the government, which have made him a veritable fortune. One might say that he is not a hierarch. But it almost comes naturally to say: lucky him!

Farinacci's outcry apparently had no effect. In reality, however, the blow was not in vain. At such a serious moment as that determined by the Anglo-American landing in Morocco and Algeria, Mussolini could leave Farinacci's letters unanswered, but he could not ignore the reactions, the "unease" of old fascism, thus leaving the field open to Farinacci and his maneuvers to strengthen and extend his *leadership* over it: establish further connections outside the strict party circle, and prepare an intransigent and strongly pro-German shift in all national politics. Hence his prompt acceptance of Vidussoni's proposal to make room in the directorate for a "hardliner" of the old guard such as Carlo Scorza, who was not a Farinacci supporter, but also for some of Farinacci's men (Tarabini and Giuliani) or those influenced by him to some extent (Del Grosso); and, again, his insistence on the importance of the party and its irreplaceability - while continuing to emphasize its function as a "link between the state and the people," that is, indirectly reiterating his unwillingness to accept the point of view of the hardliners who wanted to make it, as in Germany and the Soviet Union, the power above all others.

prior - and on that of the old squadristi, on whom - as he said in a direct message in March 1943¹ - "we must count, because they are the ones who are still on the front line today, even if, as was inevitable, the years have left some marks on their faces, but they have left no mark on their spirits," all without, however, renouncing the need and duty to continue the purge and to be careful to avoid initiatives that could benefit the intransigents and to block those that they were trying to launch.

Characteristic in this latter sense is his behavior with regard to a bill proposed to him in early March by Vidussoni, which established that federal and fasci secretaries and district trustees could not be called to account for the exercise of their functions by the higher hierarchies of the PNF, nor subjected to proceedings without the opinion of the party secretary. Now on the verge of replacing Vidussoni, Mussolini dropped the proposal, almost certainly to avoid the risk of its "anomalous" use by the new secretary. Even more characteristic is his attitude towards the "Guardia ai labari" (Guardians of the Banners).

It was Mussolini himself who hinted—very vaguely—at the possibility of creating a military organization for the party similar to the Nazi SS. However, it is almost certain that he did not raise the idea at random, nor did he intend to implement it, as he was well aware of the difficulties that it would cause him with the military and the sovereign if he went ahead with it. So much so that when Scorza took up the idea and attempted to implement it, with the establishment of the "Guard to the banners," he almost completely abandoned it, defining it, on the one hand, as a duplicate of the Militia, which would have been unfair, and which, moreover, would have raised issues that were best avoided, and, on the other hand, saving it, so to speak, from a completely different perspective, that of making it an "ideal guard" entrusted to the Gii and which should have "exalted the pride" and "sublimated the faith" of young people. To understand such behavior, one must refer to the "malaise" of the old Fascist guard, the intensification of Farinacci's maneuvers in parallel with the increasingly evident military collapse in North Africa and, more generally, the state of mind that the drama of the situation caused among those Fascists who were truly such.

Among the maneuvers originating in Farinacci's area, there was also, at the beginning of the last decade of November, an attempt by Preziosi to induce Galbiati to create, alongside the actual M Battalions, M Battalions "for the home front." According to Preziosi: "the mood of the country had deteriorated to such an extent that it was translating into growing distrust of Mussolini, who had been the only true and undisputed point of reference for Italians until then. Nevertheless, something could still be done, and it was urgent: it was possible to "create an obstacle to prevent the avalanche from growing and attempt to lessen its severity." The party should have taken care of this if its hierarchy had been up to the task and if, within its ranks, "since the membership card with its successive openings has become a kind of civil status document," there had not been "all those against whom a stand must be taken." This, according to Preziosi, was not the case with the Militia. "It," he wrote to Galbiati, "is still the only selection based on voluntarism that we have. The Militia has not been corrupted by money in its great mass. The Militia can put the brakes on and create an obstacle to the avalanche." It was therefore up to it to take action:

Create the M Battalions for the home front and you will see. Choose the men, make them masters of life on the home front too, give them appropriate tasks and you will see how much wheat, how much oil and how much grace of God will come out. Give them the freedom to catch them red-handed, and the recalled marshal of the Carabinieri who becomes an accomplice of the smugglers and the hierarch who eats white pasta and receives gifts from the smuggling suppliers. Let them come in and grab by the scruff of the neck the restaurant owners and club-goers who break all the laws, with the complicity and participation of the authorities. Let them see, under the eyes of the people who stand in exhausting queues, how the law is being violated and how the less well-off, who are the vast majority who send their sons to war, are being exasperated. Let them take on the big fish: twenty sensational examples in every large city will suffice. Let them uncover what has been hidden in the countryside; here too, a few but significant examples, wisely distributed, will suffice. Closing a few large stores for the duration of the war and confiscating some of the hoarder's goods will undoubtedly have an effect; it is always less than the death penalty.

You might say that I want to do as the child of whom St. Augustine speaks: vo- The child drains the sea by scooping up water with half a walnut shell and pouring it into a small ditch dug in the sand. And I reply that I have faith in the outcome of great examples so as not to add to the avalanche. And there is no need for masses; a few battalions are enough, made up of men who, with energetic action, deriving from the richness of their faith and self-sacrifice, make it known in practical terms that it is time to change course. Enough is enough!

If, for the sake of setting an effective example, it is necessary to throw some bigwigs out of their seats who, by shrugging their shoulders or speaking in half-words, want to establish an alibi because they do not believe in victory and do not like this war, it is the Regime that will benefit from it.

Preziosi's attempt had failed; Galbiati had been warned by Mussolini not to pursue it, and Preziosi had been severely reprimanded: "the Duce gave him a solemn lesson," as noted in the letter that Galbiati had shown him. Although Preziosi's attempt had been blocked, the matter was far from closed, and Mussolini knew it.

The idea that strong measures should be taken against anyone who did not feel compelled to commit themselves fully to tackling the situation in which Italy and fascism were sinking, and to overcoming the crisis with a supreme effort, and that to this end a draconian purge even harsher than that undertaken by Vidussoni should be carried out and, if necessary, repression against "internal enemies," was not in fact limited to Farinacci and those like him who wanted—in addition to the liquidation of the Vidussoni secretariat—a more organic relationship with Germany, seeing in it the only real guarantee of forcing the military hierarchy and the economic world to "truly" wage war. nor was it just a banner behind which many old-guard fascists hid their hostility towards the fascists of the latest generations, their moralism and their claims to take the lead in fascism and impose their conception of it. It was an idea, or, if you prefer, a state of mind, present to a greater or lesser extent - but in any case, for the moment, on the rise - in large sectors of old, less old, and young fascists who felt that the decisive moment was approaching when fascism would have to face the supreme test, prove its historical validity, and they - and here the discourse applies above all to the young people who had seen their mouths shut so many times by the old fascists in the name of the merits they had acquired for having fought in the Great War, the squadristo, the Fiume enterprise, and who now felt that the time had come for them too to pass through the 'burning bush' and earn the fascist 'titles' that had hitherto been denied them - to prove the seriousness of their aspirations for a new society, a new political, social, and moral order, and the consistency of their lives.

In this climate, proposals more or less in line with Preziosi's were taking shape at various levels. Just a few days before receiving the letter from the editor of *La vita italiana*, on November 18, Galbiati himself, in his capacity as chief of staff of the Militia, had issued a "personal confidential" circular to the CCNN zone commanders

In view of the forthcoming assignment of 5,000 young men born in 1923 to the Blackshirts battalions, the circular gave instructions that they should *a)* ensure that the most loyal young Fascists applied to be assigned to the Militia's combat units, *b)* form groups "for use in the event of disturbances to public order," in accordance with what Galbiati himself had said a week earlier in a report to the area commanders:

Public order is in the hands of the Party - The Army cannot be relied upon because soldiers are under command.

The police forces are powerless against the Militia, which must act within the law as it is also a police force.

Ten days later, in another circular, he gave instructions for each legion to prepare "in all the municipalities of its province, groups of legionnaires specially chosen for their long and passionate membership of the Party and the Militia," "possibly 'interwoven' with local squadristi," who could be easily assembled "in case of particular ^{emergency}." At the same time, as we learn from a concerned communication (secret, confidential, double-enveloped) from Vidussoni to all federal secretaries inviting them to exercise maximum vigilance, the party was aware that in some localities, as yet unidentified "special action squads" were being organized with the aim of 'the repression of anti-fascism and defeatism'.

Faced with this state of mind and the extremist intentions it fueled, Mussolini could not remain indifferent.

As usual, he could not favor them because that would have put him in serious difficulty with the military and with the sovereign, and would also have deprived him of any remaining autonomy with respect to the Germans and, therefore, any possibility of

press Hitler for a solution to the conflict in the East; but he could not ignore them and frustrate them completely either, thus giving Farinacci and those fascists who saw no other way out than that represented, internally, by a merciless repression of all "traitors" and, externally, by total alignment with Germany, an additional and perhaps decisive weapon. Hence his attempt to divert, at least at the grassroots level, this state of mind and, above all, its most extremist products towards the "Guard the banners," except for radically downsizing the project when Scorza tried to implement it. The dates are significant in this regard: Scorza brought the issue to the Directorate on June 9, 1943, and two weeks later, before it took shape, Mussolini buried it with *the ploy* of the "ideal guard."

In this same general context and, as far as Mussolini is concerned, the same logic also explains the replacement of Vidussoni with Scorza on April 19, 1943. A decision - as we have seen - that was already a foregone conclusion as far as the outgoing secretary was concerned, but more difficult in terms of choosing his successor. If it is true, as everything suggests, that after Ravasio's refusal at the end of January Mussolini was uncertain between Cianetti and Scorza until the very end, it is natural to assume that he still had some doubts about the latter. And perhaps not unjustified, considering that in the last few days before Scorza's appointment, Ciano, Farinacci, Gray, and even some unidentified "court officials" worked to obstruct Cianetti's appointment.

Scorza had been and was still reputed to be a "hardliner" of fascism:

In his diary, Bottai described him as "one of the most violent squadristi and ras in violent Tuscany," adding: "He is to be feared if his current heated intentions cause him to lose the balance that his long suffering must have ^{given} him internally." As a result of the role he played in the first crisis for Catholic Action, he was sidelined at the end of 1931. A year later, Starace, who detested him, deplored him "for his lack of political character." From then until he was appointed deputy secretary in December 1942, he was kept "on the back burner" in the Chamber of Deputies. Both he and Cianetti belonged to the old fascist guard; Scorza (born in 1897) had joined the Fasci in December 1920, Cianetti (born in 1899) in April 1921. The only difference was that, while Scorza had spent his entire career in the party, Cianetti had worked in the trade unions until 1939, when he was appointed undersecretary for corporations. This fact played in Scorza's favor in the eyes of the old fascists.

His reputation as a "tough guy," his position as deputy secretary of the party, his activism in carrying out his duties, and, finally, his lack of hesitation and refusal to join forces with Mussolini's staunchest detractors, either during the Greek affair or afterwards, all played in his favor. Cianetti, on the other h a n d — as has been said - He had had his doubts, but then he had recovered, partly out of patriotism, partly out of disgust for the "courtiers" and "unfaithful servants," but mostly because Mussolini, in his eyes as a simple man who owed everything to fascism, from his own social advancement to the idea of being able to do something to concretely improve the social conditions of those humble people from whose ranks he himself came, was everything. Extremely significant in this sense is the letter he wrote to him on April 18, 1943, as soon as he received the news of his promotion to minister:

Duce

You should leave Rome!?!?

No. Duce, this cannot be, must not be.

Do not see in my words any D'Artagnan-like exhibitionism or attitude: because I swear to you that before putting pen to paper, I had to overcome many, many feelings of reverential fear.

Who are the criminals who, as they have done for twenty years, have tried to place the burden of all responsibility on you and you alone?

For what hidden purposes are they now targeting your generous heart, daring to think that they can impose a humiliating, hateful, useless sacrifice on you?

That the Papacy should seek, after seventy years, to take moral revenge is no surprise...

But that there are Italians, and worse still, fascists and soldiers who, in the name of I know not what feelings of humanitarianism or historical responsibility, lend themselves to the most anti-fascist of traps is truly disheartening!

And it is especially disheartening for you, Duce, because no Italian has loved Rome as you have loved it and continue to love it to the limits of human possibility!

In my limited capacity and diplomatic and strategic ignorance, I am convinced that the Anglo-Saxons, despite their strong desire to bomb the capital of Fascism, also have many scruples and probably think it best to refrain from doing so while maintaining a constant threat.

But the British would be foolish if, faced with papal pietism endorsed by more or less *official* Italians, they did not take advantage of the opportunity to humiliate Fascism and its Duce!

And once they had achieved their goal, who could seriously react to their propaganda based on comparisons between the fate of the large Italian cities and the different fate of Rome, where all the high ranks of the regime would continue to live, protected by the Pope, the ruins of the Empire, and the monuments of the Renaissance?

You know, Duce, because someone will have had the honesty to tell you, that even now in Naples and Milan, due to one of those psychological phenomena that are easily understood, people are cursing the "Romans" who are not being bombed!

But then, what is this Rome before which the Revolution, the future, and the honor of a people should stop or bow down?

The historical greatness and eternity of Rome do not lie in the rickety, shored-up columns of the Forum or the Palatine Hill, but in all that Rome has achieved in the rise of human civilization. The glory of its arms, its social reforms, its laws, its arts, its roads, and the light of its victories are the measure of its greatness, which no one can ever deny, even if no manuscripts have been handed down to us!

Duce, whip all the pietistic courtiers and unfaithful servants until they bleed, because the Italians who work and fight do not engage in high politics, they do not demand the rescue of ruins and museums at too high a price, but they ask you for only one thing: Victory.

Finally, it should not be overlooked that Cianetti's intransigence aspired to take on a social character and pursued its own project in this sense, while Scorza's was entirely political and, as we have said, essentially verbal; this helps to understand why, between the two, the "sympathies" of the moderates

moderates such as Ciano ended up going to Scorza, whom they considered, all things considered, less dangerous - at that moment - than Cianetti.

While not underestimating the weight of the arguments in Scorza's favor, the real reason for Mussolini's choice is not at all clear.

In the "Report on July 25," written in Ponza on August 2, 1943, and in *Pensieri pontini e sardi* (Pontine and Sardinian Thoughts), the "Duce" not only leveled heavy criticism at Scorza's management, in particular for having "taken an openly revolutionary stance and adopted measures that significantly disrupted the state administration," but—even more significantly for us—for lacking balance and political sensitivity. In our opinion, there is no doubt that these criticisms were justified; however, we are also convinced that Mussolini was not entirely sincere in formulating them. Several facts contribute to making them appear insincere (or, if you prefer, very reticent). Mussolini's long-standing knowledge of Scorza, of his qualities, but also of his human and political limitations and shortcomings; Scorza's work in the last months of Vidussoni's secretariat, which must have confirmed rather than changed his previous critical opinion of him (on the strength of which Starace had practically banished Scorza from the life of the PNF for years without the 'Duce' lifting a finger to help him); and, above all, the fact that Mussolini, in appointing Scorza as party secretary, was well aware of how he viewed the political situation and the role of the party and knew perfectly well the program he intended to implement, having spoken with him at length on April 14 and 15 and read a detailed programmatic memorandum submitted to him by Scorza during their second meeting: which was decisive for the purposes of his appointment.

In choosing Scorza, Mussolini knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that the new secretary intended to extend the party's control over almost every aspect of the country's life and over the regime's most important and sensitive institutions: the Senate, the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, the Grand Council, the armed forces, production, etc., in some cases proceeding with their radical reform. In the months that followed, the 'Duce' systematically opposed this flow of proposals, in some cases explicitly, in others by moderating Scorza's ardor, in others resorting to the tactics of postponement, obfuscation, and withholding his support at the decisive moment (as in the case of the measure for the compulsory retirement of senior bureaucrats) for the proposals and initiatives he considered most inappropriate.

opportunities and such as to cause him problems that he wanted to avoid at all costs. According to ^{Scorza}, this led to the drastic removal of everything innovative and "revolutionary" from the text he had prepared for the speech he would later deliver at the Teatro Adriano on May 5, on the occasion of the report to the PNF hierarchy gathered in Rome, even where

- Again according to Scorza, but this statement is not true, or only true to a very small extent, because from the "note for the Duce" written by Scorza on June 7, and therefore more than a month after the cuts in question (see *Appendix*, Document No. 13), it is clear that issues such as those relating to the armed forces and Mussolini's abandonment of the leadership of the military ministries were still far from decided and, perhaps, were raised explicitly for the first time by Scorza at that very meeting - he was referring to issues and decisions on which he had previously agreed with him:

He deleted the entire section on social issues because he considered it "premature"; the measures to improve the party's moral standing because it was "a matter to be dealt with internally"; the reforms to the party's organization and the announcement of what he had decided to implement in the government, in the Chamber of Deputies, and in other bodies because they were "not specifically within the competence of the party secretary."

In light of this, it is easy to understand why Scorza, on the eve of the meeting of the Directorate on June 24, had the impression that Mussolini would "put the brakes on" him there, if not, as he wrote to defend his actions and reassure him, "shoot him down." It is equally easy to understand why, the day after the executive committee meeting, Mussolini did not level any real criticism at Scorza's policy, limiting himself to emphasizing or glossing over the points of his program that were most important to him or that he did not agree with: "shooting down" the party secretary just two months after appointing him would have been tantamount to "impaling" him.

What is difficult to understand, however, is why Mussolini, who was well aware of Scorza's ideas, intentions, and political abilities and was therefore certainly not taken by surprise by his initiatives, chose him as party secretary. For two things can be certain.

First. Even without going so far as to prefer Cianetti, Mussolini could, if he had wanted to, have found another secretary with similar "party" characteristics to those of Scorza, but more reliable in terms of character and political sensitivity and, above all, less "revolutionary" in a Bersaglieri style. Nor can it be thought that he had appointed him to keep him on the back burner until a significant military success would allow him to resume truly grand politics. It was impossible to predict in mid-April when this moment would occur—given that it might occur at all—while it was certain that, with his ambitions to expand the party's sphere of influence and his "revolutionary" hostility toward the military and bureaucratic hierarchies, Scorza would in the meantime end up making relations with them more difficult and thus the possibility of this moment arriving. So much so that Mussolini himself, while agreeing to his proposal (which he had already thought of independently) to relinquish control of the military departments in order to concentrate on the strategic and political conduct of the war, was careful not to let anything leak out, waiting for *the famous moment* when, he thought, he could do so without risking upheaval in the military administration and arousing dangerous appetites (and related conflicts) within the military hierarchy and among the most intransigent fascists, who had been pursuing the idea of bringing one of their own (apparently Alessandro Melchiori) to the position of undersecretary of war in order to break the military's monopoly on the army and control them closely.

Second. In April 1943, when he made his decision, Mussolini He was ill, prematurely aged, and aware of the dramatic nature of the Italian military situation *and the impasse* in which the Germans found themselves in the east, as well as the impossibility for Italy to resist for long, unless Hitler accepted his point of view and understood the need to end the conflict with the Soviets in some way. This led to a complex state of mind which, even though he tried not to show it, deeply distressed him and in which at least three feelings converged: the most intimate one of his own personal responsibilities; that dictated by his despair at the fate he felt Italy and the 'great work' he had undertaken would meet; and that caused by irritation - sometimes fury - at the *inadequacy and incompetence* shown by the Italians, and first and foremost by the ruling class - and by his own party more specifically.

no less than that of the traditional bourgeoisie - to "feel" the greatness of their "historic mission," to commit themselves to achieving it and, at that point, to "react" to the drama that Italy was experiencing with all their energy and not to delude themselves that the war could have any other alternative than victory or defeat, with the consequences that this would inevitably have, starting with the one - decisive for him - of putting an end not only to Italy's power but also to its moral prestige. This complex state of mind meant that he was sometimes "uninterested in minor problems" and that at certain moments he was seized by crises of despondency and discouragement that led him to isolate himself more and more and neglect current affairs. It could even cause him to lose some of his political lucidity and take refuge increasingly in his confidence in his own ability to exercise the role of '*corrupting hermit*', but it did not yet lead him to throw in the towel and give up the fight. One could even say that, like a wounded animal, the looming danger heightened his sensitivity and with it his political maneuvering skills, his imagination, and his tactical ability in the political game. This, of course, does not mean expressing any kind of appreciation for his exhausting and futile commitment to a political game reduced to tactical manoeuvring, often to expediency, but rather emphasising a spiritual condition and a *modus operandi* that would otherwise remain incomprehensible if considered only the perspective of passivity in the face of events and the randomness of his positions, which, on the contrary, despite many serious *failures*, were the result of a commitment that was, all things considered, constant and dictated by a sort of lucid political realism, albeit purely tactical and aimed at plugging the gaps, not at solving the underlying problems with drastic and truly realistic decisions. On closer inspection, traces of this commitment can be found in all the issues that, in his logic, took on particular importance.

Hence, in our opinion, it is impossible to think not only that Scorza's appointment as party secretary took Mussolini by surprise (as he indirectly tried to make people believe in the aftermath of July 25), but also that he had

appointment of Scorza as party secretary took Mussolini by surprise (as he indirectly tried to make people believe in the aftermath of July 25), but also that he had proceeded with his appointment without weighing the pros and cons, since he was more than convinced of the need to turn the internal situation around and save it from collapse before it was too late. Hence, therefore, the historical need to strive to understand Mussolini's choice.

In order to get the situation back on track, the party could, in theory, have played a role. A role which, on closer inspection, after Vidussoni's management, Mussolini had to attribute an importance that was anything but decisive but, to be more precise, limited only to well-defined and circumscribed fields. If we read his speeches in the directorate, from that

of January 3, 1943, and in particular that of April 17, on the occasion of Scorza's inauguration, onwards, without being influenced by repeated assertions about the irreplaceability of the party and the great tasks it would have to perform (essentially intended to curb the most extremist elements and prevent criticism from Farinacci's supporters), it is easy to see that, in concrete terms, Mussolini was asking the party (in addition to continuing to purge itself of "dead weight" and "unworthy" members) to concentrate its efforts in two directions. One was to increase its presence in the country through local Fasci, in order to "spread among the masses, through propaganda defined as 'word of mouth,'" the conviction that there was no alternative between war and peace, so that

We must remain here until the very end of the battle. Those who think of a separate peace are criminals; and those who believe that tomorrow the Anglo-Saxons will grant Italy a privileged position are doubly criminal.

And in that of active vigilance against defeatism, anti-fascism, and certain "reckless" and "immoral" habits and lifestyles to which part of the bourgeoisie had abandoned itself and which disturbed and corrupted the 'good' Italians. *Vigilance*, mind you, not *repression*, because - despite certain threatening tones and certain allusions to the possibility of moving from *rigor* to *terror* and his insistence on the need for a fascist police force ('not agents who are fascists, but fascists who are agents') - Mussolini reserved this for the police, making it clear that the party's task was to 'care for and supervise' the 'deteriorated' part of the country, but to 'entrust it to the police, whenever it emerges from its intellectual and moral torpor'. Two directions, therefore, that are very difficult to define as revolutionary and that ignored what Scorza would have wanted.

Nor does the substance of the picture change, indeed it becomes clearer, if we extend our examination from the positions taken in the executive committee to the more confidential ones, to the direct relationship that Mussolini immediately established with Scorza. From these and even from the pages (more than once overly intent on saving the image of their author and making the 'Duce' appear as someone who had clipped the wings of his politics) dedicated by Scorza himself to the events of his own secretariat, it is clear that Mussolini was keen to exercise strong control over the party and over what Scorza did or wanted to do, certainly stronger than that which he had exercised over Vidussoni and which Scorza had expected, and which, in essence, blocked almost all the initiatives of any importance that the new secretary would have liked to take and which, when

He did not block them, but emptied them of all "revolutionary" content or postponed them "until better times," when they would not cause new problems, or even until after the war.

At this point, a question naturally arises: if, as everything suggests, Mussolini's idea was that the party's role should be to support him with a series of mass activities—in particular propaganda, surveillance, and assistance—how could the "Duce" hope to regain control of a situation that was increasingly deteriorating and crumbling at all social levels? Restoring confidence, reconciling the regime, and galvanizing the patriotism of the lower and middle classes, especially in the major urban centers, which the difficulties of daily life, bombing, and a series of military defeats were pushing them day after day to come out of their torpor and indifference to everything that did not directly and immediately affect their daily lives, and to think that the only real way to end their painful condition was for Italy to leave the war, it was certainly no longer enough to adjust the aim of anti-bourgeois polemics — as Scorza did in his speech at the Adriano — making it less indiscriminate, crude, and juvenile, and explicitly acknowledging the errors and excesses into which it had fallen: just as, at that point, it was no longer enough to put the ac-

not so much on fascism but on Italy and on patriotism, which had to prevail over everything, as Gentile would do in his speech at the Campidoglio on June 24, nor to review and re-propose in new terms the attitude that had been taken towards intellectuals up to that point. It is hardly credible that Mussolini did not realize this.

Faced with this question, doubts about the real reason for Scorza's choice are reinforced, to the point, it seems to us, of authorizing a hypothesis that may serve, perhaps, to provide an answer to both. This hypothesis can be summarized in two points: a) considering the party increasingly as a marginal element of his strategy, useful as a force of containment and *deterrence*, but not decisive and, above all, capable of causing him difficulties once again, Mussolini chose Scorza to give the old fascist guard as much satisfaction as possible at that moment, to prevent it from abandoning itself to initiatives and rash actions that would have precipitated relations.

¹ The "speech to the Italians" (see reproduction in *Giovanni Gentile. La vita e il pensiero*, IV: *Dal di-scorso agli Italiani alla morte 24 giugno 1943* ¹⁷ April 5, 1944, edited by B. Gentile, Florence 1951, pp. 65 ff.) was requested of Gentile by Scorza, who was thinking of a series of similar initiatives aimed at preparing the spirits depressed by the capitulation of the Italian-German troops in Tunisia and then of the garrisons of Pantelleria and Lampedusa and by the massive Allied bombing of Italian cities for a defense to the bitter end and to fulfill the proper duty of Italians with that dignity - as Gentile said - "which no one will ever want to survive" and to pass it on intact to their children and grandchildren, all of whom, fascists, non-fascists, and anti-fascists, had to be able to overcome all divisions and human weaknesses. Scorza intended Gentile's speech to be followed by one from Croce, to whom *advances* were made, but which the philosopher declined (see MUSSOLINI, XXXIV, p. 274; B. CROCE, *Nuove pagine sparse* cit., II, pp. 71 ff.). Gentile's speech was widely reported, but did not have the desired effect; according to the Ministry of Popular Culture, it was even counterproductive. A preliminary investigation by the ministry summarized the main points in six items:

- « 1) - the speech would have been considered rather depressing;
- 2) - the overall tone and spirit of the speech would have given many the impression that military defeat was considered inevitable and that resistance and combat were therefore worthwhile in order to achieve an ideal victory;
- 3) - it can be inferred that the speaker wanted to demonstrate that the war was not desired by the Italian people, but rather accepted as a necessity of fate;
- 4) - the phrasing appeared convoluted, which was judged to be a symptom of an effort in reasoning;
- 5) - someone said: "we were expecting a trumpet blast and we got a Hail Mary";
- 6) - Many cannot understand why Senator Gentile was chosen to speak to Italians from the Capitol, as he is considered an insignificant figure who is unlikely to touch the hearts and spirits of the Italian people in the current circumstances. (ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto*, b. 4, fasc. 38, "Giovanni Gentile"; quoted in L. CORTESI, *Mussolini e il fascismo alla vigilia del crollo* cit., p. 20).

with the sovereign and the military leaders and, at the same time, keep Farinacci and the Farinaccians at bay; b) Harassed as he was by the need to exploit the national economy to the maximum (in certain sectors of which there was a growing tendency to save and hide existing stocks for use once the conflict was over), both to support the war effort and to try to obtain greater supplies of raw materials from the Germans, he focused more on greater state control of the economy and the adoption of social measures which, in his intentions, were supposed to inspire confidence in the party. raw materials from the Germans, he focused more on greater state control of the economy and the adoption of social measures which, in his intentions, were supposed to give confidence to the working and technical classes and to young people and, at the same time, serve as a warning to the upper middle class and, *above all*, to those increasingly numerous sectors of the financial and industrial world who were at the forefront of those who considered it urgent to break away from Germany and exit the conflict and who, to this end, were linking up with that part of the regime's political *establishment* (with which, moreover, they had always had excellent relations) that shared their views. Only in the light of such a hypothesis does Scorza's appointment as party secretary seem to find a satisfactory explanation and, at the same time, a place that is not merely a temporal coincidence in the more general context of the changes at the top of the regime made by Mussolini between the end of January and mid-April 1943.

"For the party, I thought about Cianetti for a few days, but his work is too indispensable to me for a serious reorganization of the Ministry of Corporations." These words, spoken by Mussolini to Pareschi during the decisive days leading up to Scorza's appointment and reported by Pareschi himself to Cianetti and the fact that Cianetti's promotion to minister took place at the same time as Scorza's appointment, even though Mussolini had long been aware—practically since he had appointed Carlo Tiengo to that post in February—of the precarious state of health that made it impossible for the Minister of Corporations to carry out his duties (and often even kept him away from Rome), so that the ministry of Corporations was in a state of disarray, - Mussolini had known about the poor health that made it impossible for the Minister of Corporations to carry out his duties (and often even kept him away from Rome), so that the ministry was in fact run by Cianetti, already constitute a first significant element in support of our hypothesis. A second piece of evidence—less conclusive, but nevertheless significant—is Mussolini's response on April 24 to Scorza, who wanted to make the party's voice heard again.

regarding the appointment of G. as undersecretary (replacing the promoted Cianetti). B. Baccarini: "All this concerns the Corporations and the head of government, it does not concern the party at all"; a response so blunt that it suggests, rather than a desire to clarify the limits of the party's powers, a desire to exclude *a priori* any interference by the party in the Ministry of Corporations. A third, and even more significant, factor is constituted by the measures that Cianetti, having become a full minister, sought to implement and, more generally, by the direction he intended to give to the activities of the Ministry of Corporations. Let us be clear that we do not wish to suggest that Cianetti was acting in accordance with a line precisely agreed with Mussolini or even outlined by him. In fact, there is no reason to think so, and indeed, the available sources agree that it was Cianetti who took the most significant initiatives and show Mussolini to be very receptive to them at first, but then, faced with the resistance and hostility they encountered and the prospect of the difficulties they could have created for him, he was almost always ready to drop or postpone them, without ever thinking, let alone getting rid of such an inconvenient minister, because, obviously, the argument made for Scorza's fears of being "shot down" also applies to Cianetti, but also just to put a brake on his social proposals. However, there is no reason to think that the 'Duce', who had known Cianetti's basic orientation for years and who, moreover, had had the opportunity to get to know him better during Tiengo's 'substitution' period, expected from him only 'a serious reorganisation' of the Ministry of Corporations. In the logic of *lasting power*, for him the Ministry of Corporations, like the party, had to have a function at that moment that was above all *ad deterrendum*. If Cianetti could then do something to heal the wounds of the strikes of the previous weeks and restore some confidence to the working masses, so much the better. This explains both Scorza's and Cianetti's choices, both of which, in Mussolini's view, were right at that moment but not interchangeable, since Cianetti would not have had Scorza's authority over the old guard, and Scorza would have had no credibility with the Corporations.

Cianetti, even though he had always had a sort of distrust of Bottai—partly because of his trade union background, partly because he had once harbored a certain sympathy for Spirito's "proprietary corporation," which had been rejected in Ferrara by Bottai—was a staunch corporatist. For him, the corporations, together with the party, should have constituted "the fundamental pillars of the Fascist state," the body that should have indi-

revitalize and inform social life; on the contrary, the corporative idea and the principles of the "Charter of Labor," through gradualism dictated by contingent necessities and political tactics and compromises, had taken shape and developed in a way that, in his eyes, made them instruments for the preservation and crystallization of the strongest interests. One of his main criticisms was directed at the fact that, under the pressure of war necessities and private interests, VIRI had not been linked

- as initially planned - to corporations, and Fabriguerra's line prevailed, which was to pursue state intervention aimed solely at productive aspects and, therefore, deaf to social ones. In 1937, Cianetti had prepared a plan for worker share ownership and profit sharing; in 1939, having become undersecretary, he had drafted another plan aimed primarily at reforming the trade union policy of the Ministry of Corporations; however, neither plan had gained Mussolini's approval, although he had not explicitly rejected them either.

Appointed minister, his ambition was to take advantage of the moment to bring about a "decisive shift to the left in the regime's social policy" and—realizing the impossibility of making the corporate machine truly work—to give the Corporations a more technical character and try to make them an instrument in support of his policy. To this end, on the one hand, he revived some points of his 1939 project, on the other, he aimed to strengthen the workers' unions (which he wanted to reunify into a single confederation that would also absorb the National Cooperation Agency), and on yet another, he endeavored to place the relations between his ministry on a new footing with the party (which, with Scorza, had become an advocate of a policy of vast industrial concentrations, which he opposed because of the economic and social consequences they would have), the Ministries of Finance and War Production, the Commissariat for Migration and Colonization (which he managed to bring under his control), and the plethora of economic bodies (which he wanted to reduce considerably, just as he wanted to reduce the number of corporations) on the other. Another important point in his program was to begin to make the representation of corporations in the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations more technical and less political by gradually replacing national councilors without specific expertise (whom he estimated to make up two-thirds of the "corporate" representation) with real experts.

Despite his efforts, however, Cianetti's achievements were very modest, and not only because of the few months that passed

between his appointment and the fall of the regime, but also because his policy immediately clashed with Acerbo's pragmatic and moderate approach, met with clear "legalistic" opposition from De Marsico, and was not supported by ^{Mussolini} at decisive moments.

The main clashes with the Ministry of Finance concerned the increase in the general income tax, which Acerbo considered indispensable, together with the increase in tax rates, in order to give the state budget some breathing space. Cianetti opposed this because its repercussions on prices would have canceled out the benefits that workers had obtained with the April measures and the IRI. In mid-May, Cianetti submitted to Mussolini the text of a decree-law establishing "the supervision and protection" of the IRI by the Ministry of Corporations, which would exercise these powers "in agreement" with the Ministry of Finance. More than its current value, the request, which Cianetti supported with the authority of the "Charter of Labor" (VI, VII, and IX declarations) and Article 1 of the IRI statute, had a programmatic significance for him, namely, the assertion of the "organic and functional necessity that all the various instruments used by the state to pursue its political and economic goals be included in the corporate order in the most appropriate manner." However, Acerbo immediately opposed this, seeing it as an attempt to place the IRI completely under the control of the Corporations, and he therefore hastened to support the right of financial control over it by the Ministry of Finance and to deny the Corporations economic control, or "full power of command" over the Institute. The issue thus became bogged down in a sort of tug-of-war between the two ministries, in which Mussolini refused to intervene and which would last until July 25.

More difficult (and for us also more interesting from various points of view) was the clash in mid-June between the Minister of Corporations and the Minister of Justice¹. For Cianetti, faced with the "continuous strengthening of capitalist positions," the accentuation of the tendency to form monopolies and, at the same time, the "systematic removal of economic functions from the Corporations" and their transfer to employers' organizations, which the war had greatly favored, the interests of workers, the future of corporatism, and the very credibility of the regime demanded that it be decided once and for all to crush the tendency toward monopoly and to socialize industrial complexes that exceeded a certain size and thus "lose their private character and take on a public and consequently collective aspect." As a first step in this direction, in mid-June, after discussing it with Mussolini, he prepared a decree-law that contemplated "the possibility of 'special management' for companies of particular importance to the war effort" to be implemented in the form of "direct management" by the state "through the union appointment" of the chairman of the board of directors (by the Confederation of Employers), an auditor, and one-third of the directors (by the Confederation of Workers). Accepted in principle by Mussolini, who said he was ready to bring it - first in October, then, at Cianetti's insistence in July-August - in Council of Ministers for approval, the measure met, as we have already anticipated, strong opposition from De Marsico who, threatening to resign, obtained from the 'Duce' its shelving, although it is unclear whether this was definitive, as stated by the Minister of Justice, or only temporary, as stated by Cianetti, who recounts in his memoirs that Mussolini reassured him by saying that he would pass it anyway, but not before October.

Both of these statements are probably true, which is hardly surprising, especially when considering two things: the moment at which Mussolini would have made them and the different significance that the presence of Cianetti and De Marsico in the government must have had for him.

Between June 18 and 21, when he made the two statements, despite the fact that Pantelleria and Lampedusa had already surrendered, Mussolini still believed, deluded himself, that all was not yet lost. Apart from the fact that he did not believe that the Allies would invade the metropolitan territory so soon, he believed that the Italian-German forces could oppose, if not their landing (for he was not so blind as to fail to realize the

⁽¹⁾ See T. CIANETTI, *Memorie dal carcere di Verona* cit., pp. 383 ff. and xvm ff.; A.

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overwhelming ^{enemy} air and naval superiority¹, even though he was unable to assess its full decisive importance) to their penetration inland and, therefore, to the possibility of driving them back to sea at a later stage. The statement he made in this regard in his speech on June 24 (which went down in history as the "beach speech") was not so much a reckless boast, an extreme attempt to cheer up the fascists (as it undoubtedly was), but above all the fruit of the hope to which he now clung as his last anchor of

¹ For the conditions of the Air Force between the last phase of operations in Tunisia and the Allied landing in Sicily, see AUSSMA, phase. "Copie Fougier" a n d in particular the "confidential notes" from General Fougier to General Ambrosio, some of which were certainly also sent t o Mussolini. Among these, the ones dated April 9 ("Use of the Air Force") a n d April 15 ("General European situation from the point of view of aerial warfare") and May 25, 1943 ("Strategic situation in the Mediterranean following the disappearance of the Tunisian front"), which paint a bleak picture of the availability of aircraft and the possibility of effective defense of both Italian cities and in the event of an enemy landing. In the first of these, General Fougier went s o f a r a s to propose withdrawing aircraft from operations in Tunisia, stating i n no uncertain terms that t h e results obtainable under those conditions would be of little value, but their cost would have prejudiced "very seriously" the possibility of facing, "albeit with limited reserves," the future situation, "especially with regard to the defense of our territory." Attached to the April 15 report was the status of the air units available as of March 31, 1943:

Specialty	Number of units	Aircraft inload				Crews available
		new	old	not employed	total	
		type	type	available		

salvation that the failure of the Anglo-American landing could open the way for an agreement in both Berlin and Moscow. This is clear from the context in which he inserted the famous reference to the "shoreline," that is, the need to distinguish "between 'landing,' which is always possible, 'penetration,' and, finally, 'invasion,'" which would have failed if the enemy had been "frozen" on the "shoreline." In the version published in the press at the time, this context is only partially apparent and appears to be interwoven with demagoguery and unreality (Bose "at the gates of India," the "Detroit massacres" that had revealed to Black people how false Roosevelt's promises were, etc.); in the text of the speech actually delivered, however, the central point of Mussolini's argument is another. The reference to the need to repel *the invasion* is immediately followed by an extremely revealing statement that can only refer to the Soviet Union:

and so it could well be that someone who today has been thoroughly slaughtered by the Anglo-American plutocracy might find that the game is no longer worth the candle. There are therefore still many cards in our hand, many possibilities.

This was all the more so because, despite being aware of the crisis that was increasingly tearing apart the ^{internal} front, he believed *a)* that the failure of the invasion would lead to a surge in national pride and thus cut the ground from under the feet of the defeatists and anti-fascists; *b)* that - as he would say to Ottavio Dinaie several times in March and again in July - it was necessary to proceed with caution (not to build on "detective novels," as he also said in the directory on June 24) the news and complaints ("these are exceptional times and imaginations are dangerously heated, so it is prudent to take this into account") that reached him from various quarters about obscure maneuvers and plots being prepared against him ("according to various assumptions, they would be led either by Grandi or the prince, or Cavallero or Badoglio, or the king himself...") and which, in any case, the regime was able to overcome with the strength of its state organization, the Militia, and the party:

Let's not kid ourselves... Today, there is no human force that can prevail against this compact bulwark. I am so sure of what I am telling you that I would like to

From one ministry to another: from a governmental point of view, all were dismissed without distinction; and *abruptly*, as they were informed of the "Duce's" decision only at the last moment, even Ciano, who was his son-in-law. It should also be noted that only two undersecretaries were promoted: Polverelli, who replaced his former minister Pavolini at Popular Culture, and General Fava-grossa, who saw the undersecretariat for War Manufacturing, of which he was the head, elevated to a ministry (of War Production), but his case fell not so much within the strictly political logic of the operation as within that of relations with the armed forces. In practice, with the exception of Grandi, who was also president of the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, all the former ministers left the official leadership of the regime. Only Ciano benefited from a somewhat special treatment, with his father-in-law offering him the choice between the lieutenancy in Albania^{a n d} the post of ambassador to Berlin or to the Holy See. Of the others, only Pavolini was immediately reused in his own field, entrusting him with the management of *Il Messaggero* in Rome.

To replace those who had resigned, the following were called to the Foreign Ministry as undersecretaries, as Mussolini formally took over the leadership of this ministry as well as the four (the three military ministries and the Interior) of which he was already head and which he retained: Giuseppe Bastianini² (who was replaced in his position as governor of Dalmatia by Giunta), Umberto Albini, an old fascist from Ferrara who had served in that administration since 1923 and governed important prefectures (Bari, Palermo, Genoa, Naples), Alfredo De Marsico, a well-known lawyer, jurist, and university professor, was appointed Minister of Justice, Giacomo Acerbo, the only one of the new ministers who had already held office in previous years, was appointed Minister of Finance, Carlo Alberto Biggini was appointed Minister of National Education, and, as already mentioned, Gaetano Polverelli, Carlo Tiengo, another long-time fascist (since 1926) who had entered the Interior Ministry and had been prefect of Trieste, Bologna, Turin, and Milan; Zenone Benini, Minister of Public Works, who from April 1939 to July 1941 had been Undersecretary for Albanian Affairs; Vittorio Cini, Minister of Communications, much better known as a financier and industrialist than as a politician in the pro-

property, and, finally, Trade and Currency Oreste Bonomi, an old squadrist who had been active in trade union organizations in the fields of commerce and tourism.

The reshuffle was presented by Radio London in two rather different ways. In its broadcasts for Italy, it was presented as the result, for the first time, of a real crisis within the government: Mussolini, fearing that his orders would be challenged by a fairly homogeneous group of senior officials, had replaced them with party members, almost all of whom had no government experience. In those for the interior, as a serious political crisis, desired and imposed by Mussolini, which needed to be explained with some reason much stronger than that of getting rid of the dismissed ministers, since, despite all the difficulties in which the regime found itself, it was hardly credible that the entire government was opposed to the policy of the 'Duce'. More drastically, Togliatti, speaking on Radio Moscow, explained it instead as Mussolini's need to get rid of all those who were linked to or represented social strata and groups of public opinion that were breaking away from the regime and to replace them with unknown bureaucrats, 'provincial tyrants' who would not even try to make their voices heard 'a faint voice of criticism or concern', as their predecessors had sometimes done, because 'the nation and its interests do not even know where they belong' and were therefore willing to be part of a government that "is nothing more than a committee for carrying out orders from Berlin."

Adding to the uncertainty about the reasons that might have led Mussolini to make such a radical reshuffle was the appointment of Ciano as ambassador to the Holy See, which, not surprisingly, Mussolini immediately regretted and tried in vain ^{to take back} (Ciano, as soon as he got the green light, rushed to submit the request for approval). Naturally, this was interpreted by many as a first step towards a compromise peace with the Anglo-Americans, to be attempted with the good offices of the Vatican. The US representative to the Holy See, Tittman, for example, leaned towards this interpretation, albeit with great caution, in a dispatch sent on February 13 to Hull, which concluded with these cautious but ultimately optimistic words:

Whichever of these conjectures may be true, and at present they are only conjectures, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that Ciano's presence in the Vatican has something to do with the Italians' desire for peace. It should be noted

that as a result of recent ministerial changes, which have led to the elimination of all influential fascists, Mussolini has the reins in his hands more firmly than ever and is now able to hand over the affairs of the country to a "government of peace" without opposition, whenever the opportunity arises. The recent appointment of General Ambrosio, a moderate and close collaborator of Marshal Badoglio, as Chief of the General Staff, succeeding General Cavallero, is seen as another indication of this.

The Germans also had the same impression for a moment. Von Ribbentrop's visit to Rome at the end of the month to bring Mussolini Hitler's letter of February 16 and discuss, as we have seen, a series of issues, which were important, but which ultimately did not warrant a trip to Italy at that difficult time for the Germans in the east (so much so that at first Rome feared that he was coming to ask for more troops for Russia) by the foreign minister himself, can be explained to a large extent by the alarm that the reshuffle had caused in Berlin. Pietromarchi's note under the date of February 28 is particularly significant:

Ribbentrop did not come to ask us for new troops. He asked us for laborers to be sent at a rate of 12,000 men per month. But this was clearly not the "reason" for his visit. He wanted to ascertain for himself the significance of the ministerial crisis three weeks ago. The Germans still fear the possibility of a separate peace on the part of Italy. They never know whether the Holy See might act as an intermediary. Now the dismissal of Fascist figures involved in Axis politics, their replacement with people who, except for Cini, are almost unknown, the presence of Bastianini, former ambassador to London, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ciano's appointment to the Holy See, and the long, mysterious stay of Monsignor Spellmann were all causes for doubt. We therefore wanted a precise, public guarantee, as binding as possible, of absolute solidarity, and this guarantee took the form of a draft communiqué, the acceptance of which on our part was the real purpose of the visit. It was on this draft communiqué, which has not yet been made public, that the most lively debates took place. Among other things, it was af-

stopped the Axis's willingness to fight until the Allies surrendered. It seemed a bit exaggerated to us. Evidently, the Germans wanted to respond to the statements made in Casablanca, but it is well known that they did not have much of a sense of the ridiculous.

In reality, Mussolini had no intention of forming a "government of peace" to which he could hand over power at the appropriate moment, nor did he consider exploring the possibility of a separate peace with England and the ^{United States}. His thoughts were directed toward the east, not the west. It is no coincidence that, commenting on the news of the reshuffle, Luca Pietromarchi noted:

It cannot be ruled out that, in resuming his position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Duce intends to play the famous card that he has repeatedly claimed to have in reserve. It is said that he dreams of an alliance with Russia. This would explain his statement, in his

schi' a "courteous, friendly but very firm" attitude¹ and, more generally, his decision to "return to politics" and first and foremost with Berlin.

This is also demonstrated by the fact that a week before proceeding with the government reshuffle, Mussolini had replaced Cavallero as Chief of the General Staff. This is not to say that Cavallero's dismissal on January 31 was decided by the "Duce" solely because of his excessively submissive attitude towards the Germans. In fact, other reasons and pressures of various kinds also contributed to this decision, partly from the fascist milieu and partly from the military (where old hostilities towards the marshal were now compounded by those who saw his dismissal as an essential prerequisite for any action aimed at removing the "Duce" from power and taking Italy out of the conflict), which Mussolini could not ignore or failed to assess correctly.

To say, as some claimed at the time and has often been repeated since, that Cavallero was sacrificed because the "Duce" needed a scapegoat to blame for the defeats in North Africa is too simplistic. Cavallero's star had begun to fade on Mussolini's horizon (even though he always admired him for his organizational skills and dynamism) as early as March-April 1942, when he had to start thinking that those who accused him of being too weak towards the Germans (the circle around Ciano, who had also supported his appointment at the time, was already saying at this point that he aspired to become their "military Gauleiter") were not entirely wrong. of favoring his loyalists or those who could not overshadow him and of persecuting and discrediting possible competitors (an accusation that the "Gambata case" would make more insistent). However, the victorious advance in Egypt had restored his prestige, even though Mussolini was very irritated by his "carelessness," which had exposed him to the humiliating and futile wait in Africa for the conquest of Alexandria. Then it began to fade again, partly because of the increasingly unfavorable course of military operations and partly because of the Supreme Command's inability to make the services responsible for the production and distribution of equipment more efficient.

payment suited to the climatic needs of the various fronts, particularly the ^{Russian one}; and finally, to some extent, because of Cavallero's relationship with Farinacci. However, it must have been Cavallero's less than transparent attitude in October-November 1942, when Mussolini's health had deteriorated considerably and the 'Duce' had had to give up a large part of his normal activities, that completely overshadowed it.

In an already extremely difficult situation due to the increasingly unfavorable course of the war in the Mediterranean, the growing difficulties encountered by the Germans in Russia (which dramatically affected the Army), the massive Allied bombing of Italian cities, the worsening economic difficulties and the internal repercussions that all this was beginning to have, and on which, moreover, M. Taylor's recent stay in the Vatican had the effect of causing the most disparate agitation in all circles of the regime, in this situation, we were saying, Mussolini's illness and the spread of increasingly dramatic rumors surrounding it, including those claiming that he had cancer and was in danger of dying or, in any case, on the verge of having to withdraw from government, had caused agitation among all components, centers of power, and groups of the regime. This led to a flurry of hypotheses, proposals, and initiatives, some more unrealistic than others, which largely dissolved like soap bubbles when, on December 1, -bre, Mussolini was able to resume his normal activities almost completely, but which involved almost all the major figures of the regime and, above all, those who, in various capacities and with different positions, would be the protagonists of July 25. Among them was Cavallero. What the marshal really had in mind is still unclear today. In the so-called "Cavallero memoir," written by the marshal on August 27, 1943, he outlined his position in terms of complete loyalty to the sovereign and even favorable to Badoglio (in power in August 1943) and, all things considered, not hostile to Mussolini either:

Last November, when His Excellency Mussolini was seriously ill, we had to consider the worst-case scenario. As Chief of Staff, I was concerned about this.

suddenly began to die, he instructed Gen. Magli and Gen. Ambrosio the necessary orders to ensure order in the country, which would allow the King to decide who to entrust with the government of the country and the command of the armed forces, a person who he thought should be Marshal Badoglio, "under whose orders, he writes, I told my subordinates, we would all place ourselves." This last detail is not accurate, and everything suggests that Cavallero was thinking more of himself. He worked hard on this project, and through wheeling and dealing and intrigue, he sought support in the political arena and even attempted to secure the collaboration of a figure who was notoriously and consistently hostile to the fascist regime for the government he intended to form. This figure was taken aback by the invitation to return to political life as a member of a government that would be formed under the aegis of Germany. It cannot be ruled out that the Germans were also looking for a successor to Mussolini and had themselves thought of Cavallero, while Cavallero, who was certainly not lacking in intelligence and cunning, sensing the course of events and anticipating that upon Mussolini's death or fall, the King would choose Marshal Badoglio to succeed him, perhaps tried to prevent this by seizing power *by force*, which he then intended to use wisely depending on how the situation developed.

Vitetti's assessment is confirmed by a note dated November 5 in Alberto Pirelli's *notebooks*:

Cavaliere considers military dictatorship inappropriate unless it is *a last resort*. He has recommended a mixed government with fascist elements, including Galbiati, but not made up of military personnel.

It is impossible to believe that Mussolini was unaware of Cavallero's attitude, nor can it be ruled out that he was informed of it—at least to some extent—by the sovereign himself, both because he used to inform him even of confidential matters and because he might have thought that this would make the marshal's position more precarious. Nor can it be ruled out that Mussolini had formed his own opinion, more or less similar to that put forward by Vitetti, namely that Cavallero was too closely linked to Farinacci and the Germans. Hence his decision to distance himself from him.

remove him from the Supreme Command and to do so before proceeding with the government reshuffle, so as to make it less difficult for the military and the sovereign himself to remove the most influential moderate exponents of fascism, who, above all, were those with whom they had the closest relationships (in particular the military with Ciano and the sovereign with Grandi) and with whom they were most in tune. That Mussolini did not consider that, by removing Cavallero from the Supreme Command, he was depriving himself of an important card in terms of his political position and power and opening a gap that would be filled by elements, as we saw on July 25, is another question, which we believe can be explained in part by his violent anti-German sentiment at the time and in part by the extreme tactical approach to which his political action was being reduced, leading him to make choices dictated more by the need to deal with daily exigencies than by a long-term strategy. Unless we think that he intended to rebalance, so to speak, the situation that had arisen in the military leadership with the appointment of the dull but certainly not easily manipulated Ambrosio as chief of staff as soon as he had regained control of the general situation, and that he had therefore chosen Ambrosio so that he could dismiss him without trauma when he reached the age limit in July. However, there is no confirmation or sufficiently authoritative evidence to support this hypothesis.

Among the various hypotheses and self-nominations circulating between October and December, there was also that of a moderate fascist government that would have sought to establish preliminary contacts with the Anglo-Americans. Various solutions were proposed for its leadership, ranging from a combination of Ciano, Bottai, and Grandi "under the aegis of Federzoni" to a Ciano ministry *tout court*. During the same period, Ciano, perhaps encouraged by "advice" given to him by the sovereign "to cherish any thread that could be re-knotted, even if as thin as a spider's web" with Washington and London, and urged in the same vein by his chief of staff, Lanza d'Ajeta, who was in contact with the most "restless" elements of the General Staff and, as we shall see in the next chapter, was supporting their maneuvers to attract Ciano into their orbit, had authorized the ambassador in Lisbon, Frasoni, to sound out the British position on a possible Italian request for peace³ and the

"Sapieha mission," also in ^{Lisbon}, and wanted to send Ambassador Rosso (who had represented Italy in Washington and Moscow) to Ankara to establish contacts with the Anglo-Americans there as well. It is very likely that all this influenced Mussolini's decision to "clean house" in the government; however, it is impossible to say whether and to what extent he was aware of it. The drastic opinion that von Ribbentrop formed when he came to Rome at the end of February, namely that the reshuffle had been determined solely by Mussolini's desire "to sideline Ciano" and that he had "wrapped the matter up in a great deal of noise to distract and divert public comment from this elimination"², seems to us, however, to be untenable.

The reshuffle of February 6, and even more so its scope, depended only in part on what had happened during the acute phase of the leader's illness.
"Duce."

For some time Mussolini had been champing at the bit, intending to remove from the government and from his inner circle those ministers and collaborators in whom he no longer had confidence or esteem, whom he considered defeatists. He was aware of their intrigues, their relentless criticism, their defamation of him, and knew that they were the subject of gossip and unpopular in the country and disliked by the party, both the old guard and the young. Even Ciano, whom he had forgiven many things in the past for the sake of his daughter Edda and whom he had defended so as not to give

satisfaction to the Germans, who had been hoping for his removal since the end of 1940, he now appeared too cynical, frivolous, and discouraged to continue staying at Palazzo Chigi. The fact that he did not make this clear should not be misleading. On the one hand, he had become almost completely withdrawn, to the point of avoiding as much as possible even direct contact with the few people for whom he felt 'friendship' and with whom he was happy to maintain a thread of relationship and when he had to see them for official reasons or listen to them with that patient kindness that - as Vittorio Cini recalls in a still unpublished "memoir" dedicated to his own life - he generally used with everyone, and which in their case concealed a sort of intimate examination, a comparison between the past and the present, a judgment on their being and their desire to appear, rarely going beyond the limits of the issues to be dealt with (a typical case was when he learned that Bottai aspired to be appointed ambassador to the Holy See²:

¹ From the end of 1940 to early 1941, Mussolini's relationships with intellectuals with whom he had once been close and friendly were reduced almost entirely to brief and rare contacts, almost always related to political occasions. Typical examples include Gentile, whom he saw mainly when he brought him the new volumes of the national edition of Mazzini, and Papini and Soffici, whom he saw in 1942-43 in connection with a trip (Papini) to Germany and the project, mentioned above, to found a political-cultural fortnightly magazine (Papini and Soffici), and also that of Marinetti, whom he received several times but always in some way connected with cultural-patriotic initiatives and war propaganda. It should also be remembered that when, in October 1941, Pavolini informed him of his intention to stop Marinetti from broadcasting radio programs, both because he did not communicate their texts in advance and improvised them, and because of "the most vehement protests of numerous listeners" scandalized by their "very particular style of thought and expression," despite his friendship with the founder of Futurism, Mussolini approved the decision (ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto*, b. 6, fasc. 57, "F. T. Marinetti").

With Gioacchino Forzano, with whom he had collaborated in the late 1920s and early 1930s on the drafting of *Campo di Marte*, *Villafranca*, and *Cesare* (see *Mussolini il duce*, I, pp. 31 ff.) and with whom, immediately after Italy entered the war, he had discussed the idea of an anti-British historical propaganda film based on the "history of a small English bank from 1794 to the present" (later made by Forzano with the film *Il re d'Inghilterra non pagò*), his involvement was limited to following the preparation of the screenplay for another film, *Piazza San Sepolcro*, which Forzano wanted to prepare for the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome (in reality, it was only finished in June 1943) and which was supposed to be a grand fresco of the events of the last 150 years of European history. "Seeing how all these great events," Forzano wrote to him on July 24, 1941, "have had unfair and unjust conclusions, always beneficial to only one side, seeing how you and you alone have foreseen, desired, and implemented the destruction of so much injustice, will give everyone great emotion." (cf. ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943)*, W/R, fasc. "G. Forzano"; as well as F. SAVIO, *Ma l'amore no. Realismo, formalismo, propaganda e telefoni bianchi nel cinema italiano di regime 1930-1943*, Milan 1975, pp. 292 ff. and 408 ff.).

During these years, Mussolini rarely emerged from his isolation, except on occasions such as the death of his son Bruno, when he personally replied to letters of condolence written to him by old friends, indulging in memories of their previous relationships and using some unusual expressions, as in the case of Ada Negri, to whom he replied with a "Dear Ada" that he had never used before (see COMES, *Ada Negri da un tempo all'altro*, Milan 1970, p. 162).

² Bottai's relations with the Catholic world and the Holy See, and the growing pro-Catholicism that characterized the Minister of National Education during the war years, are still largely unknown. The only person who has shed light on certain specific aspects of this was R. MORO in the introduction to G. BOTTAI - G. DE LUCA, *Carteggio* cit., pp. evi ff., dedicated to Bottai's attempt, at the end of 1941, to introduce the teaching of theology in universities. It is unclear whether the operation aimed to bring fascists and Catholics together in a 'new humanism, both Catholic and totalitarian', broadly speaking, in the name of an anti-bourgeoisism that was a synthesis of Sorel's socialist and Péguy's Catholic versions, or whether it was already conceived

"I refuse to believe," he blurted out, "that the daring Bottai should end up as a sacristan at the age of forty-six." Or he would engage in conversations with them that were actually more like monologues and often soliloquies: partly so he wouldn't have to listen to them, partly to emphasize how far their positions, their attitude toward life, and their morals were far removed from his own, partly because of those (like Grandi) for whom he still harbored a residual human affection and a sort of respect, in order to try to make them understand why he could not help behaving as he did, and partly, finally, because "the monologue represented for him a temporary liberation from arguing with apodictic judgments." On the other hand, he waited for the right moment to proceed with the reshuffle.

In this context, the events of late 1942 were merely the classic straw that broke the camel's back, prompting Mussolini to make the most drastic and sweeping reshuffle yet, essentially moving away from the big names of the regime—all of whom, to a greater or lesser extent, had fallen in his estimation and were often suspected of "defeatism" — but on men who were in a certain sense *new* (either absolutely or because they had been away from government for some time), uncontroversial, whom he considered honest, technically prepared, loyal, and "good patriots," that is, neither "defeatist" nor staunchly pro-German. These were men — and here we come to the crux of the operation — whose presence in the government was intended, on the one hand, to satisfy those Italians who still had faith in him and did not understand why he had kept unworthy men around him and given them credit for so long; on the other hand, not to alarm any social group too much, politically and socially, without, however, giving credence to the belief that any possibility of more radical solutions should be ruled out from the outset; on yet another hand, he had to secure the collaboration of a series of exclusively technical experts; in short, collaborators who would not interfere in fundamental political decisions—which the "Duce" wanted to reserve entirely for himself—and who would devote themselves solely to making the state machinery function as well as possible and to translating his fundamental instructions and choices into technical terms. This explains why, in choosing them, he did not

with a view to the "post-Mussolini era"), long advocated by influential Catholic philosophers such as A. Carlini and E. Castelli, and supported by the rector of the Gregorian University, the Jesuit Paolo Dezza, and by Monsignor G. De Luca, but received with lukewarm enthusiasm and therefore not supported by the Holy See, fiercely opposed by Gentile, Spirito, Luigi Volpicelli, and Galvano Della Volpe, and frowned upon by Mussolini (who had already expressed his disapproval in July 1939, when Bottai first mentioned it to him), it failed miserably, much to Bottai's chagrin, who must have been counting on it to strengthen his relations with the Catholic world. For Bottai's close relations (since 1936-37) with Monsignor Tardini, see C. F. CASULA, *Domenico Tarditù (1888-1961). L'azione della Santa Sede nella crisi fra le due guerre*, Rome 1988, *passim* and

ceased distinction between *moderates* and *revolutionaries**, from a technical point of view, such a distinction seemed worthless to him; from a political point of view, the presence of ministers with different "mindsets" was anything but unwelcome to him, both because of the image of the government he hoped to promote in the country and because he believed that it would allow him to favor one or the other depending on the needs and his political maneuvers.

As far as the regime's circles were concerned, at first the reactions to the reshuffle—with the obvious exception of those ^{who had been} ousted—were not negative overall. Even Cassandra, who was critical of everything Mussolini did or did not do and who had long wanted him removed from power, as De Bono had been for some time, described it as "on the whole a friendly ministry," in which there were "people we can trust more," limiting herself to observing that "Cini would have been better in Finance" and that "there is still the problem of the command and the military ministries held by him," "but there," he added, "we will not be able to break through."² And Pietromarchi, despite his friendship with Ciano and his disappointment at seeing him ousted from Palazzo Chigi, noted in turn:³

The Duce had been mulling over this ministerial change for almost a year. Last May, Grandi, having promulgated the codes, had pointed out to him the incompatibility of his functions as President of the Chamber and Minister of Justice, between legislative and executive power. The Duce had agreed, but told him to wait three months, at the end of which he would change some ministers. He had already mentioned upcoming changes to the King three times. However, no one thought he would dismiss his son-in-law. It is true that the latter did not spare his father-in-law from criticism and was quite blunt. It seems that two months ago Cavallero reported some of these remarks to the Duce. It is to be expected that the minister's withdrawal will make him more popular.

What hurt the Duce most was the rumor that he was ill. Now that he has fully recovered his health and, according to reports, has gained four kilos in just one week, he has shown that he is still in charge and has taken back the reins. And it was necessary. The country was adrift. Many of the ministers were openly defeatist. The new ministers, apart from Cini, are second-rate figures, but honest and loyal.

In reality, the crisis of the regime was so advanced that just a few weeks were enough to disprove Pietromarchi's prediction that the reshuffle would bring Mussolini "new popularity." At that point, appointing new ministers meant very little. It could satisfy a certain number of active party members, but not all of them, because not only the Farinaccians but also the *hardliners* among them wanted something else entirely, both in the choice of new ministers and in the basic direction of the government. However, it could not put a stop to the internal disintegration of the regime or the growing desire for peace in the country, and even less could it make the government an effective instrument of power and support for a policy that was increasingly taking shape as based on the expectation of some *decisive* 'new facts' which, however, largely escaped Italy's concrete possibilities and initiative and remained entrusted to Germany's military capabilities and political-strategic choices. If we add to this the criteria that had presided over the choice of ministers, it is easy to understand how the new government soon proved to be - and Mussolini himself would explicitly acknowledge this in *his Pensieri pontini e sardi (Pontine and Sardinian Thoughts)* - less cohesive and 'weaker than the previous one'. On the one hand, it was politically more lackluster, and on the other, it was characterized not by its *revolutionary* members (even when Scorza and Cianetti joined in April) but by its *moderate* members (who, moreover, could count on the support of a large part of the state bureaucracy), all of whom were more or less aware of the unsustainability of the situation in Italy and, therefore, of the need to make a clean break. Of course, no one knew how to follow up on this awareness with concrete operational guidelines, so that, to a greater or lesser extent, everyone ended up leaving the solution of the problem to the "Duce," to his political skills, to his personal relationship with Hitler, and to his influence over him. While waiting for a solution, their awareness made them defenders of *the status quo* against any political or social initiative or project of *the revolutionaries*, to the detriment of the freedom of maneuver and political maneuvering that Mussolini had thought to secure by bringing *moderates and revolutionaries* together in the same government.

According to ^{Acerbo}², in addition to himself, Cini, De Marsico, Bastianini, Albini, and Benini were in favor of a "prompt withdrawal" from the war.

besides himself, Cini, De Marsico, Bastianini, Albini, and Benini. However, after what we have said about their lack of initiative, the real point of the matter is not so much how many and which members of the government were convinced of the necessity and urgency of ending the conflict, but rather their relationship with Mussolini on the pia-

his intentions¹) and, *above all*, the regime itself. Because—and this must be made very clear—if there was a relationship of mutual influence between the two crises, that of the country and that of the regime, the second was considered by the "Duce" to be the more dangerous, as it was more advanced, less controllable, and, above all, more dynamic than the first. And not without reason, given that only the internal collapse of the regime, i.e., the breakdown of the various components and forces on which it was based, could lead to its removal from power.

With the Allied landing in North Africa and the start of heavy ^{aerial} bombardments the number of Italians who felt they were being "dragged toward an increasingly bleak fate, gripped by the horror of the abyss," had gradually increased, as had the number of those who no longer had faith in Mussolini, considering him responsible for everything and the only real obstacle to Italy's exit from the war.³ and with it the number of those who no longer had faith in Mussolini, considering him responsible for everything and the only real obstacle to Italy's exit from the war. Hence the "anguished repugnance" but also the "discouraged disappointment" that his statements and incitements to fight increasingly aroused, because what dominated, and would dominate until the end, was essentially a sense, depending on the circumstances, of anger, sadness ^{and} above all, powerlessness, which ended up becoming, for the masses, acceptance of a reality and a life that, despite everything, had to be endured and lived because there was nothing else to be done. So, while waiting for events to unfold, what inevitably ended up mattering more and more to this mass was not a tomorrow that no one knew when it would arrive or what it would look like, but today, in its everyday life. And not infrequently, on the part of those who had no economic difficulties and lived in places where the bite of war was less felt, such as Rome they even lived with resigned and at the same time cynical carefreeness. A carefreeness that contrasted with the growing malaise of the poorest, of those who struggled more and more every day to survive.

However, this too was essentially without any real possibility of manifesting itself actively, regardless of what some cardinals and monsignors in the Vatican thought. Unaware of the profound difference between a liberal state and a totalitarian state, even one in disarray as the fascist state had become, they did not realize that the "popular anger" they had feared ^{would explode} for months could in reality only have manifested itself after the fall of the regime, on which the mood of the poorest classes and even that of a large part of the bourgeoisie could only have had an indirect influence, *through* the various components of the regime and their concerns about the 'post-regime' period.

After what we have already said, few words are needed to explain Cavallero's replacement and the government reshuffle. The first, welcomed with jubilation by the military high command, who considered it a necessary prerequisite for the realization of their plans to disengage from Germany *and* start negotiations with the Allies, aroused in political circles more than just consensus (almost exclusively among moderate Fascist leaders, who were now also increasingly oriented towards Italy's exit from the conflict) perplexity and heated criticism, while in the country it had a negative effect.

In fact, it sounded like further confirmation of the dramatic nature of the military situation and, therefore, on the one hand, it further depressed spirits, and on the other, it brought new fuel not only and not so much to the anti-fascists, but above all to those who, at that point, were experiencing Italian reality not from a fascist or anti-fascist perspective but simply hoping for the end of the war. Not to mention the fact that, as we have already mentioned and as we will see in the next chapter, Cavallero's dismissal paved the way, or at least greatly facilitated, the military hierarchy's preparations for Mussolini's dismissal. However, the military still needed the sovereign's approval, and without the consent of Victor Emmanuel III, they would certainly not have taken action. Given the formalities, scruples, and caution of the sovereign, being able to access him and *institutionally* present their concerns and intentions was therefore extremely important for them, perhaps even more so than getting rid of a chief of staff whose true intentions were unknown to them. The scruples and caution of the sovereign, an extremely important fact for them, perhaps even more so than getting rid of a chief of staff whose true intentions were unknown to them and who, moreover, had a reputation for being pro-German. Mussolini did not achieve more positive results from the reshuffle of the government first and then from the promotion of Cianetti to minister. In this regard too, after what has already been said, there is no point in dwelling on the matter. Moreover, it is certainly not without significance that, thinking back a few months later on the events of his last government, Mussolini made no mention of Cianetti and dismissed the whole matter with a few general words: "the effect of the change lasted only a short time"

Finally, with regard to Scorza's appointment, we believe it should be noted that in the general failure of the entire operation that Mussolini had attempted to carry out, particularly with regard to the party, was the aspect that had the most significant consequences, not only in terms of the objectives that the "Duce" had set himself, but also in terms of subsequent events. Renewing and revitalizing the PNF was a task that no one could have accomplished at that point. It would therefore be unfair to blame Scorza for not succeeding; other charges can be made against his activity as party secretary. As for the issue that concerns us here, paradoxically, the "fault" of Scorza—but also of Mussolini—was that of having given the impression that he could succeed, to the point of arousing, at the very beginning, the hopes and even the enthusiasm of those fascists who still believed in fascism and Mussolini and thought that the changing of the guard at the top of the party would prelude a new January 3 and that "third wave" to which the "Duce" occasionally alluded and which, once the broom had been wielded, would sweep away the old guard and bring in a new generation of young, energetic, and enthusiastic members. Party leadership would herald a new January 3 and that 'third wave' to which the 'Duce' occasionally alluded and that, once the broom had been wielded, all the *true* Italian people would be with Mussolini, ready to make all the sacrifices necessary to turn the tide of war in

Mediterraneo¹. So when, even before the invasion of Sicily, these hopes vanished and with them the "Scorza effect," the party found itself, both internally and in relation to the country, in a worse condition than when Scorza had taken over its leadership. Within a few weeks, the PNF found itself even more divided by internal conflicts between various existing and potential factions (which the events of July 25 and, above all, September 8 would exacerbate), prey to a rebelliousness and extremism that were as inconclusive as they were irresponsible, influenced both by old grudges of a more or less personal nature and by old revolutionary and 'Jacobin' ambitions - fuelled above all by the old fascists, particularly those who had joined the Fasci di combattimento with a history of subversive militancy behind them - and

¹ In the climate of hope and enthusiasm aroused in the PNF by Scorza's appointment, in the days immediately following the appointment itself, incidents of squadrist intolerance occurred in various locations, both against individual citizens known for their "defeatist" attitude or considered "bad Italians" (in Rome, for example, several citizens were beaten up because they did not take off their hats when the banners passed by during a parade organized to celebrate the founding of the Roman Fascist Party), and against particularly unpopular leaders. Bottai was symptomatically the victim of one such episode: his speech at the Quirino Theater in Rome was punctuated by boos and interruptions such as "how did you make your millions?" See A. PI-RELLI, *Taccuini cit.*, p. 430 (April 22-23, 1943); G. GORLA, *L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale, cit.*, p. 412 (April 24, 1943).

² A characteristic example of this is a manifesto letter sent to Mussolini via Walter Mocchi in mid-May by a group of "precursors" and "continutors" of "the syndicalist thought and action of Filippo Corridoni." Claiming their unwavering trust in him and in his "firm will to bring about the Revolution in the triangle of Social Justice, gradually eliminating the system that is the cause of the present injustices" (despite "the pauses, apparent deviations and contradictions, obstacles and sabotage imposed by the interests of classes that are hard to die"), the authors of the manifesto letter urged Mussolini "to break the deadlock." "*Traitors of all kinds,*" they wrote, "*must be hunted down wherever they hide in salons, in private and public offices, in industry and commerce, in sacristies, in the ranks of the Party and the Armed Forces, in embassies and consulates of neutral countries, and inexorably punished with exemplary penalties: Jews and those who act like Jews, the authors and manipulators of the black market and all forms of speculation at the present time, hoarders and especially those who, having enriched themselves in the shadow of the Littorio and profiting from its provisions, now, in the illusion of being able to preserve their ill-gotten gains, mysteriously conspire among themselves and conspire with the enemy, proposing to overthrow men and institutions.*"

But above all, Duce, it is the workers' unions that must be addressed at this critical moment, and not with flattery and promises.

Certainly, all the social legislation that has been implemented is and was a commendable achievement of the Regime; but it is not with assistance

welfare and insurance that we can overthrow the rural plutocracy, nor can we confront Bolshevism, which is rumbling at the gates and already fraudulently penetrating the interior like a suffocating gas.

Instead, we must decide to facilitate the spontaneous emergence of a new economic and social order, which must replace the capitalist system and avoid the communist one.

And for this reason, it is urgent, first and foremost, to truly achieve parity between employers' and workers' organizations in order to restore workers' confidence in their unions, which they now consider, and not always without reason, to be puppets of the employers' confederations. They know that since 1926, the law has guaranteed them the right to choose their own leaders and officials, but they also know that after some twenty years, their unions are still languishing under administration, even if elections are sometimes held. And the vast majority refrain from joining or, at least, from attending union meetings, convinced that it is dangerous or useless to seek their support for the injustices suffered at work.

Secondly, it is necessary to intensify cultural and professional education for the proletariat and the middle classes as much as possible, and, above all, to teach the most naturally suited individuals those technical and administrative skills without which social management and production remain a bourgeois privilege.

Finally, it is essential to authorize, encourage, and promote the creation, on the periphery of the Organization, of

of the general atmosphere in the country and of a state of uncertainty and, above all, frustration that manifested itself in many different ways: with a growing exodus of disappointed and now resigned militants, with a growing tendency to shirk responsibility and danger and to prepare the ground to attempt, at the opportune moment, to 'change sides' and present themselves as anti-fascists, with people - especially young people - asking themselves a series of questions about the past and the future (which at the time generally remained unanswered, but which would be decisive for many of the choices made after July 25 and especially after September 8) and, above all, with an almost general collapse of the party. Hence the loss of what little residual capacity to react to events remained, and in the first place to the crisis on the home front, which explains, at least in part, the passivity that would characterize the PNF's attitude on July 25.

Given the way the regime was conceived and structured, the party alone, even in a completely different situation, would not have been able to prevent the regime's self-dissolution, which was desired by all its other components; even less so, therefore, could it have prevented Mussolini's removal at that moment. The only weapon it could theoretically have used was a violent reaction to the coup, which it could not have prevented, but which would have precipitated the situation in terms of Italian-German relations. A violent reaction, even if limited to a few large centers, would in fact have put Hitler in a moral and political position to intervene immediately in Italy, which he did not do.

trade unionization, of quasi-trade union production bodies, financing them generously and not being alarmed if, in the early stages, the results were not always brilliant.

At the same time, the laws of the Fascist State should, in our opinion, resolutely attack private organs of plutocratic and capitalist exploitation and their representatives, not in order to transfer their functions to state, provincial, and municipal organs, except in cases of public services; but to entrust them to parastatal, paracorporate, and parasindical entities, recognizing the original share capital as no more than five percent of their actual balance sheet value, and directing industry, agriculture, and commerce toward the exclusive ends of general welfare and no longer personal gain." And they concluded: "We are certain, Duce, that by following the path marked out by this Manifesto, which above all confirms our unshakeable trust and devotion to you, at whose command we are ready to sacrifice our blood, you will immediately rid yourself of the enemies who surround you, who owe everything to you and who, obsessed with preserving the evil they have done, are ready to betray you and the Fatherland, and to gather around you, in a renewed burst of hope and enthusiastic faith, the enormous mass of the Italian people." (ACS, *RSI, Private Secretariat of the Duce, Correspondence*, b. i T, phase 58, "W. Mocchi").

¹ At the end of May, R. Del Giudice summarized the party's condition in his diary (in the *Del Giudice Archive*) in these terms: "The party's organization is undermined by the same poisons that corrode popular unity. Hierarchs and herd mentality are appalled; they condemn the loudmouths at rallies, but they cannot deny the sadness of certain bedroom tales, certain tales of enrichment, rampant corruption, misrule, and central misgovernment. The assembly of the Fascio di Roma is, for me, an open document of this scandalous and rebellious state of mind of the old guard, of which those who still believe take refuge in the exclamation: But the Duce must have a decisive card in his hand! And in the meantime, they endorse the most insidious rumors, demanding the execution of the newly rich, the purge of the Party, the cleansing of the bureaucracy, and the strengthening of the armed forces."

² See, for example, the diary entries from January to July 1943 by G. MAGNONI in *Quegli anni, quei giorni* cit., pp. 59 ff.

In the aftermath of July 25, when power formally and legally passed from Mussolini to Badoglio without opposition from the fascists, and Italian assurances that this would not change relations between the two countries allowed his generals to convince him not to rush into intervention. This was despite all the consequences that immediate intervention would have had on the attitude of the king, Badoglio, and probably the Allies, but also on a significant portion of Italians. Apart from the fact that the general secretariat of the PNF did not give any indication in this sense, as we shall see, and, on the contrary, moved in the opposite direction, the absence of any spontaneous reaction to the news on July 25 of Mussolini's "withdrawal" from the government shows how deep the crisis was in which the party had fallen with the exhaustion of the "Scorza effect"

Nor did the party's crisis manifest itself solely in its gradual loss of effective responsiveness, because, the more it collapsed in on itself, the more it began—as already mentioned—to abandon itself centrally and locally to demands and initiatives of extremism, often in open contradiction with Scorza's statements that he wanted to pursue a policy of patriotic unity and correct the mistakes made in the past. It is difficult to understand how much this was a consequence of frustration, how much a conscious attempt to hide his own impotence or force Mussolini's hand, and how much the result of tragic self-deception. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that these extremist tendencies (typical examples, to name but two, but significant if only for their unpopularity, were the increasingly frequent calls for a "finally uncompromising" attitude towards the Jews and the continuous exaltation of "brotherhood in arms" with the

(1) We refer in particular to those civilians and military personnel who, while convinced of the need to save Italy from utter ruin and therefore to put an end to an alliance that every day appeared to be nothing more than a source of damage, death, and humiliation, worsening Italy's position in the eyes of the Anglo-Americans, also felt a "moral duty" not to "betray" their ally and therefore harbored the illusion that Italy's exit from the conflict could take place through some form of prior agreement with Germany. Half a century later, with the benefit of hindsight and in light of the profound changes in moral values that have taken place in the meantime, such a position, as well as that of those military personnel who, having fought alongside the Germans for a long time (especially in Africa), nurtured a strong sense of camaraderie towards them that overshadowed other considerations of a less personal and more political nature, may today appear unjustified, if not absurd. However, it is a fact that this position—present above all among the middle classes—was not quantitatively insignificant and that everything suggested that it would have disappeared if it had been the Germans who had "betrayed" Italy, i.e., attacked it by

Germany and the need to make the alliance even closer and "totalitarian"), the PNF only isolated itself further within the country, attracting new hostility even outside the Catholic and "anti-fascist" world, further diminishing what little personal prestige it had left (which by then was manifested almost exclusively in the question, halfway between hope and spite, "What is the Duce doing?") that Mussolini still enjoyed in the eyes of a certain number of Italians, especially in smaller towns, and - more importantly - ended up strengthening the pressure within the regime to find a way out of the conflict at any cost.

At this point, with the failure of Mussolini's attempts in early 1943 to strengthen his internal position and gain time to try to get Hitler to accept his strategic political vision, and how these attempts ended up backfiring on him, sowing new mistrust and hostility towards the regime and his own person, and, worse still, aggravating the crisis within the regime, at this point, we were saying, the discussion could be considered concluded. Before moving on to discuss the final outcome of this crisis in the next chapter, however, we believe it is appropriate to pause for a moment on two final aspects of the events discussed so far that directly concern Mussolini's 'private' life, but which nevertheless cannot be viewed outside the general context of the regime's crisis and which it is worth clarifying; both to provide as complete a picture as possible of the intermediate stages of this crisis and to gain a deeper understanding of how it was experienced by Mussolini.

Much has been written about the relationship between Mussolini and Petacci, not only from a sentimental point of view, but also from a more strictly political one, to the extent that it became an important element in the crisis of the regime. This is true both on the part of a certain number (and a certain type, since it is no coincidence that the relationship between Mussolini and Petacci is not mentioned or only vaguely alluded to in the diaries and memoirs of men such as Acerbo, Cianetti, Federzoni, Gorla, Grandi, and Pirelli, while they abound in those of Bottai and Ciano), both contemporaries and biographers of Mussolini and "scholars" of the period. This is why—while shunning any form of "history" conceived with the mentality of "valets de chambre"—we feel it is appropriate at this point in our discussion to dwell briefly on it.

When the war began, Mussolini had already been involved with Garetta^{Petacci1} for several years (since the second half of 1936). For some time, the

Their relationship had gone unnoticed; it was only in the second half of 1938 and especially later, when the Petacci family had built a luxurious villa in Monte Mario, in the Camilluccia district, that rumors began to spread, particularly in the capital's high society and in circles connected to the regime. In short, due to the gossip and sarcasm aroused by the film debut of her sister (stage name Myriam di San Servolo) and the financial dealings of Garetta's brother, Marcello, the news began to circulate with such insistence that even strangers began to turn to Petacci for help and recommendations. Despite this, when Italy entered the war, it cannot be said that the relationship was still scandalous or that Petacci was attributed any political influence, even though more than one of the 'Duce's' collaborators realized that for Mussolini it was not one of his usual affairs, albeit a slightly longer one, but a real bond, and Buf-farini Guidi had, in any case, been concerned with extending his "protective" hand over Petacci since the end of 1938.

Of the "political influence" of Petacci and, above all, of her family, over which her mother reigned supreme (as Luigi ^{Freddi} wrote, "something between a boxer and a caryatid, the living expression of that resolute and intrusive matriarchy that still survives in certain families in the Italian provinces"), and of *the clan* of schemers and parasites that formed around her, can only be seriously discussed after the end of 1940 and even more so in the second half of 1941. But even for this period, without exaggeration, despite the fact that even then (since the great flowering of these parallels and judgments occurred immediately after July 25) some spoke of her as a "little Pompadour" ^{and} of her brother as a sort of Lorenzino dei Medici who did "more harm to the Duce than fifteen lost battles" and there were even those who claimed that "he should be put up against the wall" or said they were "ready" to "take out" the

Claretta herself¹ for the damage that her relationship with Mussolini caused to the country's image of the "Duce," to his prestige among the fascists themselves², and to his mental balance, to the point of attributing to her "everything that is wrong in Italy, including the Duce's illness." This was a statement that even Ciano, who was certainly not fond of Petacci and her clan and who was often the source of news, gossip, and slander about her, could only describe in his diary as "honestly a little exaggerated."

Personally, Claretta Petacci was not a schemer, nor did she have any ambitions to play a political role. To quote Jo' Di Benigno—who largely reflected the opinion of military circles, which were certainly not very sympathetic, when he wrote his book, *Mussolini e la Petacci* (Mussolini and Petacci)—
 "She did not have the nerves to wield her scepter." "She was prone to tears and had the sentimental heart of a petty bourgeois." "Those who wanted to see her as a new Pompadour and played their cards on her were unlikely to succeed." Of course, she had her likes, dislikes, and prejudices (especially towards the military, whom she considered incompetent and potential traitors), but she was essentially motivated by the desire to protect her man and, not infrequently, by jealousy, the jealousy that made their relationship difficult at times, punctuated by breakups and reconciliations. These two feelings were played upon by her family, by the clan that formed around Camilluccia— which led to it being referred to as the 'most important ministry' where careers were made and broken and positions of power were assigned— and by many hierarchs, petty hierarchs, and adventurers of various kinds, especially Buffarini Guidi. This does not mean, let's be clear, that Petacci did not have a certain influence on some of the choices made by men, but certainly not to the extent that has been rumored, and even less so on the most important ones. She was probably responsible for the appointment of lawyer Gino Sotis as national councilor, who had dealt with the

his divorce in ^{Hungary}, and, similarly, that of Nicola De Cesare as head of the Duce's private secretariat, when Sebastiani was removed from this position due to the joint maneuvers of Rachele Mussolini and Buffarini Guidi. Despite everything that was said, she certainly had no influence in the major government reshuffle in February 1943, of which she was informed almost by chance by Mussolini after the fact during a phone call ("I have decided on a changing of the guard... Riccardi, Di Revel, Venturi, Buffarini... the two cronies [Bottai and Grandi], Pavolini... imagine, even my son-in-law is there... in short, they're all leaving"), so that Buffarini Guidi had to limit himself to a simple "I'm sorry." Nor does this mean that he did not end up playing a certain political role, albeit more against his will than deliberately, to the point that, especially in the last months of 1942, when Mussolini's illness worsened and rumors about Petacci's alleged political power became increasingly insistent, as did those about the discredit that her relationship with the "Duce" was bringing on the regime and on Mussolini himself, even the Germans became concerned and tried to get to the bottom of it.

However, it is also advisable to be as precise as possible in this regard. and, above all, make some fundamental distinctions. There is no doubt that the relationship with Petacci contributed to the discrediting of Mussolini and the regime. However, it was only at the end of 1942 that it caused widespread discredit, when it spread from the regime and its circles, particularly in Rome, to many parts of the country, became a battle cry for Radio London broadcasts, and was taken up by the anti-fascists and circulated among the people, so much so that even before July 25, to give just two examples, some anti-Mussolini verses were circulating in the Bergamo area, the first two of which said, "When you see Petacci on a bicycle| it means that Benito is in bolletta '4^{and} police informers, not knowing how to report the salacious comments and harsh judgments circulating about Mussolini, had to resort to circumlocutions, such as this one, preserved in a report dated June 12, 1943, on public sentiment in Rome⁵:

The popular reactions to this state of mind [aroused by the scarcity and high price of foodstuffs] are active, strong, continuous, and tortuous, reaching

to unexpected points. So we note these days, commenting bitterly, that it is always the King or other members of the royal family who visit and comfort the wounded, who go to see for themselves the places devastated by enemy bombing. *Added to this observation are certain malicious or poisonous remarks about the Duce that cannot be reported*, but which are clearly the result of the current situation, especially the food situation, and which no one would dream of making or even thinking about in times that are just a little less sad and difficult than the present.

It should also be noted that, rather than the fact that Mussolini had a mistress, what caused a long-running scandal was the cinematic fortunes of Claretta's sister and, even more so, the succession of rumors and reports about ^{her brother's} economic activities and arrogant intrusiveness. It should also be noted that Mussolini, pressured above all by his sister Edvige and his daughter Edda (perhaps the only people who could speak to him frankly) was also convinced. At the end of June 1942, indignant at Marcello Petacci's behavior, he ordered him to "refrain from any trafficking in the future" and then, in view of the meager results obtained, to take up service in the Navy. And at the end of April 1943, after having already reduced his meetings with Claretta for several months, he decided to break up with her. So, on May 1, she found herself barred from entering Palazzo Venezia. This was a solution that Mussolini had probably been mulling over for some time, but he was only able to stick to it for a short time (it is unclear whether this was because he could not do without her or because he feared an even more sensational scandal or even blackmail by Claretta's family)⁵, before giving in to Claretta's insistence and then breaking ^{up again}⁶ and ^{making up again}⁷. Finally, we cannot overlook the fact that there was a massive outcry from a large part of the regime's *establishment* and, at the forefront, from some of the leading fascist figures against Petacci.

Mussolini's "unconscious weakness" towards her and her "mephitic" clan contributed greatly to the power games woven around the affair by Buffarini Guidi. A quick glance at contemporary diaries, particularly those of Ciano and Bottai, is enough to realize this. With great skill and rare ruthlessness, for years the Undersecretary of the Interior managed to play a complex game on two tables, that of the Petacci family and that of the wife of the "Duce" ("Buffarini," General Puntoni noted on April 27, 1942: reporting what General Hazon had told him: 'maneuvering in the shadow of the Duce's family women') in order to exploit and direct the prejudices and animosity of the two women towards those whom, from their respective points of view, they considered treacherous and, worse, traitors to Mussolini, thus increasing his personal power, marginalizing those who were unwilling to lend themselves to his maneuvers or, worse, were hostile to him, and replacing them with men loyal to him or, in any case, easy to manipulate.

There is no ^{doubt} that the Petacci *scandal* damaged Mussolini's image, particularly from the summer of 1942 onwards, and contributed to the regime's discredit. It is less easy to say when Mussolini realized this and to understand the reasons that prevented him from truly ending the relationship. To explain everything with passion is most likely to oversimplify things. This is both because he cared deeply about his image and, although he was certainly not a moralist, he was quick to condemn those who had extramarital affairs and realized the damage they caused when they became public knowledge and a cause for scandal (in Rome, probably referring to Pavolini and his affair with the actress Doris Duranti, said at the beginning of 1943, "as long as there is no scandal, passions must be considered a necessary journey of the heart"); and because it is difficult, despite what has often been written, to speak of his truly overwhelming passion for Petacci. This is demonstrated, among other things, by the nature of their relationship, as we shall see in the next volume.

- he would have taken on after his return to freedom in the aftermath of the armistice, and which is well summarized by what he himself said to his sister Edvige towards the end of September 1943 to explain why, after the humiliations and arrest that Petacci had suffered during the forty-five days of the Badoglio government, it did not seem right to him to abandon her to her fate: "How could I send her away now that she has suffered this for me?"⁴

As we have already mentioned, the relationship with Petacci began at a particularly difficult time for Mussolini on a personal level, when, after the long period of tension caused by the war in Ethiopia and the illness of his daughter Anna Maria, he began to feel the negative effects of his incipient physical decline due to age and, at the same time, the accentuation of his human loneliness, partly - as we have said - by his own choice and theory, and partly due to the death of his brother Arnaldo, to whom he had been very close, but who - being the only person who really had any influence over his wife Rachele (a woman who, despite appearances, had a character that was anything but easy) - had indirectly made it possible for him to have a fairly relaxed and peaceful family life, which he had practically lost with his death, so much so that he spent most of his days, even holidays, away from home, either shut up in Palazzo Venezia or occasionally going on road trips or, what relaxed and satisfied him most, flying in an airplane, in the solitude of the sky. In this psychological state, his relationship with Petacci was more a way of feeling young again than a great passion and, given the woman's passionate yet simple and discreet character, despite her periodic outbursts of jealousy, a way of finding a few moments of relaxation and filling his loneliness in some way. In short, it was a stable relationship, but not an extremely demanding one, such that, as far as can be judged, he could have ended it without too much trouble if he had wanted to. This was at the beginning, because a series of new events later contributed to strengthening it.

In general terms, this was due to the gradual increase in mistrust. and Mussolini's contempt for most of his collaborators and even for many of his old friends and comrades from the "eve," which indirectly enhanced Petacci's loyalty and lack of ulterior motives in his eyes and, on the other hand, made him turn a blind eye to the very different behavior of his family members. This was all the more so because turning a blind eye, and sometimes both eyes, was an almost innate tendency of his in this matter and, at the same time, a typical aspect of his political *modus operandi*, which Luigi Freddi has very well outlined in a page of his memoirs² unjustly neglected by Mussolini's biographers and which, on the contrary, we think it appropriate to recall, given that, as it became increasingly ingrained in him, it began to influence not only his political behavior but also his more personal behavior.

Among the seemingly contradictory aspects of this man's protean personality, there was one that was truly disconcerting: he knew everything about the people around him, near and far, because the countless information periscopes at his disposal excluded nothing, not even the most hidden shadows of the vast, dense, and often turbulent area. And it happened that he tolerated some of them incomprehensibly, even though he knew that they were not entirely morally, politically, or stylistically pure. But he also knew that politics is done with people, and people, to quote Marquis Colombi, are what they are, and politics certainly does not improve them. (Speaking of himself, he once quoted a phrase from Terence to me: "*Nihil humani mihi alienum est*"). But he never caused scandals, except when, very rarely, it could benefit his tactics. He excluded unworthy or guilty men with a slow, patient, secret action of moral crushing: after, of course, neutralizing them. So it could happen that, when talking to trusted people, he would suddenly drop a contemptuous judgment on someone who, perhaps, held a high office. One could be sure that, at the right moment, that person would disappear into oblivion.

More specifically, the relationship between Mussolini and Petacci in the summer of 1940 was greatly affected by an ectopic pregnancy with a risk of peritonitis, which endangered Petacci's life and resulted in a long hospital stay and an even longer convalescence, and, a year later, by the death of Bruno Mussolini.

The letters Mussolini wrote to Petacci in August-September 1940, during the most difficult period of his illness, suggest that this contributed significantly to strengthening Mussolini's bond with her ("I am beginning to detach myself from everything and everyone, that is, from the world. Especially since you have been ill," reads one of them), and help to explain how it was precisely after his illness that the relationship between the two began to show the first signs of strain, prompting Petacci to interfere in certain political appointments and Mussolini to listen to her in some cases. The death of his son Bruno on August 7, 1941, while testing a four-engine bomber, contributed even more to strengthening this relationship. Although he tried to hide it as much as possible and forced himself to present his son's death as similar to that of the many combatants engaged in the conflict, the pain of his loss must have been no less than that caused by the death of his brother ten years earlier. This was compounded, if one can say so, by the fact that Bruno's death left not only a further void in his soul, but also in the immediate circle of his daily microcosm.

family¹, making the sense of loneliness and detachment from everything he did not consider his supreme "duty" feel even heavier and more oppressive. Revealing in this regard are the concluding words of *Parlo con Bruno (I Talk to Bruno)*, written by him in the weeks following his son's death (as he had done with *Vita di Arnaldo (The Life of Arnaldo)* after his brother's death) and published by Popolo d'Italia in December of the same year:

which led him, when he could no longer bear it, to vent his feelings to his son Vittorio. I quote this outburst, in early 1943, as recounted by Vittorio himself in one of his ^{memoirs}:

According to your mother, I am surrounded by traitors, spies, saboteurs, weaklings! Do you think it is necessary to shoot forty generals, decimate regiments, imprison ministers? When things go wrong, great politicians, saviors of the homeland, messiahs of peace proliferate. Everyone has solutions, including hysterical countesses and Cinecittà filmmakers. Do you think I don't know what they're whispering discreetly? Right now, they don't have the breath to blow their trumpets, they're still not sure: what if the Axis starts winning battles again? And then, dear Vittorio, let it be clear once and for all that, whether we win or lose, *there are no traitors in Italy* when we are at war. Do we want to return to the Italy of Caporetto? We must hold on to Tunisia and stand firm in Russia: by achieving significant military results, it is possible to find a political solution. A war to the bitter end, if the Allies were to win, would only benefit the Russians and the United States, but more the former than the latter, and would not bring peace and justice to the world. England and France, whether they win or lose, will see their colonial empire go up in smoke. Perhaps Churchill sees things this way, but he is caught between Roosevelt and Stalin. An uncomfortable position.

Finally, the impact that Mussolini's illness had on the whole Petacci affair the following year should not be underestimated.

Much has been said about the nature and actual severity of this illness, without reaching any precise conclusions. In the previous volume, we briefly mentioned Mussolini's health on the eve of the outbreak of war, taking into account the findings of the autopsy performed in 1945 at the Institute of Legal Medicine of the University of ^{Milan}. At this point, however, it is appropriate to try to explore the issue in greater depth, given that it concerns not only the relationship between Mussolini and Petacci, but also the much more important question of the impact of the Duce's state of health on his political behavior in the last year of the regime. This is all the more so given that, in addition to what was written, very briefly, by Cesare Frugoni (who was the clinician who most closely monitored the patient during this period) and, much more extensively, by Arnaldo Pozzi (Frugoni's first assistant and designated by him as the attending physician)³, a wealth of documentation is now available.

medical documentation (test results, prescriptions, reports and letters relating to the course of the illness, etc.) preserved in ^{Mussolini's} personal archives.

From this documentation, it is possible to establish with almost absolute certainty that the disease dominating Mussolini's biological physiognomy was essentially a gastroduodenal ulcerative condition. Although not proven radiologically (a case that is far from rare), it had imposed itself forcefully with the most classic, evident, and common of complications: enteritis. This does not rule out the possibility of other, much more serious hypotheses.

¹ ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943)*, fase. FP/R, 'B. Mussolini', sottofase. 6, 'Malattia del Duce'. Copies of some of the documents in question are also kept in ACS, *Ambasciata Tedesca*, b. 1.

Information about the illness, taken from his wife's diary, also in R. MUSSOLINI, *La mia vita con Benito*, Verona 1948, pp. 172 ff.

² In 1925, hematemesis, melena, and fainting were symptoms observed and recorded in his medical records. They clinically identify an ulcerative lesion, which is practically certain, preceded by a multifactorial etiology and pathogenesis that is still largely unknown in ulcerative disease.

Among the many factors that cause ulcerative disease, however, emotional stress acting on a particularly predisposed individual is the most significant. The nature of this predisposition is still the subject of fruitless debate: an episode that confirms the diagnosis, an X-ray performed for dyspeptic reasons, or the sudden onset of a complication, all guarantee that we are dealing with a predisposed terrain. The diagnosis of predisposition is therefore presumptive in ulcerative disease.

Unfortunately, diagnosing gastric or duodenal ulcers is complex without the aid of endoscopic equipment, which is available today but did not exist at the time. This is why a diagnosis of gastritis or gastroduodenitis generally masked that of an ulcer until something clarified it, either clinically or radiologically. Moreover, however much one might want to identify discriminating symptomatic nuances, the differences between the dyspeptic-painful syndrome characteristic of gastritis or gastroduodenitis and that of gastric or duodenal ulcer disease are very few and insignificant.

In any case, dyspeptic-painful syndrome requires a controlled diet that does not stimulate excessive production of gastric acid, an essential element in both dyspeptic and painful manifestations.

Dietary mistakes are promptly punished by gastrointestinal patients, who cannot afford spices, spicy fried foods, etc., all substances that good cuisine has devised over the centuries to please the palate but which undermine well-being and health.

However, even a correct and very limited diet does not protect against subjective disorders and the objective development of peptic ulcers if strong and/or repeated emotions stimulate their activity.

The importance of psycho-emotional life on the genesis and evolution of ulcerative disease was proposed by the observations of Cushing, a neurosurgeon, who had demonstrated the almost constant appearance of gastric or duodenal ulcers in surgical procedures that involved the hypothalamic regions.

A life of responsibility, emotions, anxieties, apprehensions, etc. is the worst substrate for a patient with gastric or duodenal ulcer disease. The psycho-affective vicissitudes of such a patient influence the course of their disease much more than individual episodes, even if they are intensely emotional.

Obviously, patients exposed to a life full of stressful stimuli must monitor their diet more closely than others, excluding more or less indulgent exceptions.

Despite all precautions, however, spontaneous developments and, above all, emotional distress can cause particular changes in the course of the disease, which, from being silent or controlled, can take on a more or less complicated form of intense activity.

When, in Mussolini, after twenty years of dyspeptic syndrome which, in retrospect, the initial bleeding (1925) allows us to attribute to an ulcer, arterial hypotension, weight loss, asthenia, and adynamia suddenly appear, there are not many hypotheses that come to mind in the clinical diagnosis: a non-massive hemorrhagic relapse, malignant neoplastic degeneration, or an association

including stomach cancer, or that the importance of a minor amoebic infection contracted in Libya in the summer of 1942 was overestimated, and that this must have been the triggering cause, and, finally, that too much importance was attached (in the sense of underestimating other aspects) to the impact on the disease of the increasingly intense tension and *stress* to which Mussolini was subjected and which he himself tended to consider the real origin of his illness (typical in this sense is his recurring joke: "my ulcer is the convoys"¹ with obvious reference to the continuous and very serious losses of ships supplying troops in North Africa).

Although not serious enough to justify catastrophic predictions, the illness was nonetheless severe and prolonged, perhaps due to the carelessness with which it was initially treated, not by Mussolini, who was a model patient and followed medical advice as closely as possible, but by his *entourage* at Palazzo Venezia and, to a certain extent, even by his family members, with the sole exception of his wife who, however, even in this case, acted mostly on the basis of more or less sudden moods and mistrust of doctors, and even went so far, according to Pensotti, as to believe that someone had tried to poison him.

Mussolini experienced the first symptoms of the onset of a new phase of his old illness in Libya in early July 1942. His son Vit-

blood dripping, as is rarely observed in bleeding ulcers, while it is common in intestinal parasitic diseases and ulcerated malignant tumors.

In fact, parasitological examination of the stool showed the indisputable presence of amoebiasis, as confirmed by four observers. However, such a marked impairment of cenesthesia and general condition, with progressive weight loss, was inconsistent with the practically random finding of histolytic entamoeba, without symptoms referable to organ localization: no bloody diarrhea, no amoebic liver abscess, no hyperchromic anemia, no persistent constipation, no eosinophils, etc. The hypothesis of a tumor of the stomach or, alternatively, of another intestinal segment, was compelling. Even then, it was known that 5 to 20 percent of gastric ulcers, even those clinically healed, undergo cancerous degeneration, while this occurrence is quite exceptional in the case of duodenal ulcers.

Mussolini had previously suffered from melena, a typical symptom of gastrointestinal bleeding, whether gastric, duodenal, or even more distal, but also hematemesis, which is more likely the closer the source of bleeding is to the mouth. For this reason, since the radiological search for an ulcer had been unsuccessful, clinical probability led to both a diagnosis of ulcer and a diagnosis of its gastric location.

This medical reconstruction (for which we are deeply grateful to our friend Professor Luigi Cucci) was confirmed at the time in a telegram sent by the Portuguese representative to the Holy See to his Foreign Ministry on February 2, 1943:

"Today I had the opportunity to obtain reliable information about Benito Mussolini's illness. In fact, I was able to speak with Professor Pozzi, the Duce's personal physician. He is suffering from ulcerative gastroenteritis: the rumor that it is a malignant disease is therefore unfounded. There is nothing alarming, but the professor visits the Duce every morning at 9 a.m. and accompanies him when he leaves Rome. When I asked the professor whether the Head of Government's physical discomfort was

torio, who was also in Libya at ^{the time}. Also from that period is a letter from Nicola De Cesare, who was accompanying the "Duce," to Petacci. This letter not only confirms what Vittorio Mussolini wrote later, but also provides an early indication of the flippant manner in which, at least initially, *Ventourage* dealt with Mussolini's illness and the jealousies and maneuvering to which it gave rise.

D.'s health, wrote De Cesare, is improving day by day, both thanks to the diet that your father has scrupulously prescribed and the pills we give him according to the prescriptions your father gave him (Castellani has been completely left out) and for which he wanted all the instructions, so I also gave him the notes your father left me, and because of the rest he is getting here, which is so complete that he is very bored, but this helps him relax his nerves - every now and then we take a drive and then we stay put - so overall he is doing very well... All in all, you can rest assured that I won't leave him alone for a minute; I sleep in the room next to his...

Upon his return to Italy, Mussolini received virtually no medical treatment. His wife began to feed him a strict bland diet, and Professor ^{Castellani}, the only doctor apparently consulted, diagnosed an amoeba infection contracted in Libya, which was tedious but easily treatable and therefore not a cause for concern. All this took place with Petacci behind the scenes, who would have preferred ^{his father} to treat him. It was only in early September, faced with Mussolini's increasingly evident deterioration in health (already on July 23, Bottai, who had not seen him for some time, had found him "pale, emaciated, lonely, assailed by his old age"⁵), that his family began to really worry. In Ciano's diary, dated September 26 there is a letter written to him by Edda a few days earlier from Capri, which is significant in understanding how things had gone up to that point and how, all things considered, they would still go to a certain extent in the following months: without any clear ideas, in fits and starts, rather than with constant commitment.

My father, Edda wrote, is not well—heartburn, irritability, depression, etc. My mother has painted a rather bleak picture for me.

Warning: we are on the road to ulcers. (Many considerations about him: his private life in recent years; the effects, etc.; it is not appropriate to talk about it). All kinds of X-rays have been taken—all negative—but no doctor has ever been called. When they asked about Frugoni and were told that he was out of Rome until the 4th, they all stopped at the obstacle and said goodbye. Rarely have I seen people more ill-advised. - Take care of it yourself - if it's not Frugoni, then Fontano - if not him, then someone else - but make sure my father is seen and examined seriously - Get in touch with my mother and help her - For now, the only measures he has taken are insults and profanity - And a clinician is preferable in case of illness - naturally with a certain degree of secrecy.

Albeit slowly, things finally began to move ^{forward}. On September 1, Rachele Mussolini spoke with Professor Castellani, who reiterated that it was only amoeba, "a tedious illness, but one that can be treated well," and told her not to worry. However, three days later, faced with her repeated insistence, he suggested a consultation with Frugoni, a name that Rachele was initially hesitant about "for various reasons." But then, faced with her husband's continued weight loss and "pressure from the family," she finally agreed. Frugoni, who examined Mussolini on the 28th, believed that it was not amoebiasis but a recurrence of the ulcer and ordered a series of tests, which gave contradictory results. Castellani saw them as confirmation of his diagnosis, but they did not lead Frugoni to radically change his own: for him, it was a syndrome similar to hyperacid gastritis and amoebiasis, which influenced each other and it was not easy to say which was more prominent. This was on October 14, after which everything underwent a new inexplicable pause, so much so that on November 4, Frugoni turned to De Cesare for news of the patient:

at Palazzo Venezia for his normal activities, on bad days, when he often stayed at Villa Torlonia and greatly reduced his activities (on October 25, Vidussoni had to cancel by telegram a meeting of the National Council of the PNF convened for the 29th precisely because Mussolini would not be able to attend), the deterioration of the Duce's health 'I was now so evident and well known that trying to hide it at all costs, to the point of treating him almost clandestinely and with half measures, was not only impossible but ended up - as we have already said - giving rise to the gloomiest predictions and rumors, increasing political unrest, further weakening the regime, and giving breath to the most disparate political designs and ambitions of succession. We say this because, while it is true that after Frugoni's letter of November 4, the treatment of Mussolini's illness entered a new phase, it is nevertheless indicative of the situation in which the whole question of the illness itself must be framed, as it was experienced and "managed" by the close *entourage* of Palazzo Venezia and by the Duce's own family members, the fact that the letter was written to De Cesare, who was in practice the 'superintendent' and 'manager' of the illness much more than Mussolini's family members and Rachele herself, who only managed to impose her will at particular moments, without, however, being able to really take control of the situation, which in fact remained almost completely entrusted to Mussolini's moods and attempts, his (sometimes very painful) efforts (concerned about the political consequences) and De Cesare's *supervision*. This *supervision*, on the one hand, also had to take political aspects into account and, on the other hand, was greatly influenced by the close relationship between De Cesare himself and Petacci and, therefore, by the conviction of her father, also a doctor, that Castellani and Frugoni had not understood that the illness was psychological in origin. This explains how, despite the patient's obvious deterioration and the doctors' alarms, Mussolini's state of health ended up being considered by De Cesare as something for which little or nothing could be done except wait for a recovery that, much more than the doctors' care, could depend on the mood of the 'Duce' and, therefore, ultimately, on the course of the war. so that, for the moment, the most important and urgent thing to do was to keep the political situation under control, to make Mussolini's limited activities, which he was able to carry out in those conditions, less burdensome, and to play down as much as possible the whole aspect of the crisis surrounding the "Duce's illness."

That said, it is nevertheless a fact that after Frugoni's letter, the treatment of Mussolini's illness entered a new phase. Professor Pozzi, Frugoni's first assistant, was tasked with constantly monitoring his progress and, from November 11, began visiting Villa Torlonia daily (where the "Duce" continued to spend many days, often in bed) to examine him and administer the treatment prescribed by Frugoni, and also to accompany him on his travels (especially to Romagna, where he often retired to rest better), including those to Salzburg and Feltre to meet with Hitler. However, the initial results of the new cycle of treatment were disappointing. As Frugoni wrote to De Cesare on November 29, Mussolini's decline continued: compared to the onset of his illness, his weight had decreased by about a quarter and his maximum blood pressure had dropped from 145 to 110. This did not prevent him from

"leader" to speak three days later at the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations² and to resume most of his normal activities for over a month. However, when, in mid-December, he was supposed to travel to Germany to meet Hitler, as we will see in the next chapter, he did not feel up to facing two days on the train (given the season, air travel was out of the question) and had ^{Ciano}³ replace him. Faced with this situation, at the beginning of the year Frugoni must have had doubts for a moment that he had misdiagnosed and feared that Mussolini might have cancer. On January 5, he sent, through De Cesare, a first letter to Rachele in which, after summarizing the situation (Mussolini had lost another 1.5 kg and his blood pressure had dropped to 70-102) and announced that he had begun "an energetic restorative treatment" and arranged for a new series of blood, stool, and urine tests (the month before, he had already had a cholecystography and an X-ray of the digestive system performed). He mentioned for the first time some "perplexity" about the nature of the illness:

Locally, there are no new objective data, but the pain persists despite the energetic treatment administered in this regard. And since the pain syndrome is fixed and persistent, it cannot be denied that this causes a certain amount of perplexity and poses problems that are beginning to cause some concern.

At that moment, the wife of the "Duce" was at Rocca delle Caminate, where she had taken refuge "out of desperation" after one of her usual violent outbursts, it is not clear with whom, but which had been about the treatment her husband was undergoing and which she did not agree with. And at the Rocca (where Mussolini had meanwhile joined her to get some rest, as suggested by Professor Pozzi), a few days later, almost certainly on January 14, 1943, she received a new "terrible letter" from Frugoni "(which he asks me to destroy as soon as I have read it) in which he informs me that he believes Mussolini is suffering from advanced cancer that is life-threatening." At this point, incredulous, Rachele wanted to proceed immediately with a consultation (which she must have already discussed with Pozzi) with Professor Domenico Cesa Bianchi, whom she knew well and respected, having treated first her husband and then one of Arnaldo's sons in the past. The consultation took place at the Rocca on January 17 and ended in the most reassuring manner.

The consultants' agreement, Pozzi noted in his diary, fully recognizes "a history of liver disease and duodenal ulcers; currently, gas trite and chronic duodenitis, with postprandial pain syndrome on ulcerous terrain, and competing factors partly hepatic and partly deriving from nervous tension; therefore, continue with calming, tonic, and restorative treatments."

Whether this diagnosis was right or wrong (the autopsy would establish that, when he was killed, Mussolini suffered only from "mild atrophic gastritis," which means that either the two distinguished clinicians had made a mistake or that the German doctors who treated him during the period of the Italian Social Republic had almost completely cured him), it is a fact that in the following weeks Mussolini's condition improved overall, his weight increased by a few pounds, his blood pressure rose to 125, and his pain became less severe, despite the suspension of the sedatives that had been used until then. So much so that in early February, Frugoni became increasingly optimistic, even writing to Rachele, "We can now consider everything to be coming to an end, and we have already entered full convalescence" (January 31) and "in a couple of weeks or three, we will begin to reduce and then slowly abandon the treatments" (February 7). Apart from the fact that the crises, although occurring less frequently and generally in a less acute form, did not cease altogether, the real black spot remained the loss of appetite and that

Although Mussolini had resumed a more active life, with longer stays in Rome and short periods of rest (during which, however, he worked almost as hard as he did at Palazzo Venezia) at Rocca delle Caminate (sometimes personally piloting the plane to and from Rome and Forlì), and felt able to cope with the physical, intellectual, and psychological strain of traveling to Salzburg to talk to Hitler. But the "abandonment of treatment," which Frugoni had thought would soon be possible after the first positive results, never happened. After returning from Salzburg, the pain, which was particularly intense and acute at night, returned to afflict him, so much so that Frugoni felt the need for a new radiological examination of the digestive system and, subsequently, at the end of May, another of the stomach and duodenum and, more significantly, a consultation with a surgeon (whom Mussolini wanted to be Professor Vincenzo Puccinelli, we do not know whether because he already knew him or because he had been recommended in Salzburg by Hitler's personal physician, Morell). Both the consultation on June 6 and the radiological examinations confirmed the diagnosis of gastritis and duodenitis and the therapy practiced up to that point, ruling out any possibility of surgery. The only new prescription was fifteen to twenty days of complete bed rest, which lasted until the eve of the Directorate meeting on June 24, after which Mussolini resumed his activities in full, so much so that a few days later he considered going to inspect the defenses of Puglia, Calabria, and Sicily. He did not do so as a result of a sort of "conspiracy" between Ambrosio, De Cesare, and Pozzi (who feared "the strain of a long trip in hot and sunny Sicily"), each of whom, for different reasons, was hostile to the idea. Even though he was not fully recovered—when he became overly tired or particularly tense, as on his return from Feltre the day after the first bombing of Rome, the pain returned, even in a very acute form - and even though, as soon as he could, he took refuge in Romagna to rest (but also to see as few people as possible and think about the situation undisturbed), there is no doubt that on the eve of July 25, Mussolini's health had improved considerably. This suggests that, however important, the psychological aspect was not the main reason for his illness.

The impact of the disease on Mussolini's relationship with Petacci can be seen viewed, in our opinion, from at least two perspectives. From the perspective, so to speak,

politician, there is no doubt that the illness and the resulting frequent absences of the "Duce" from Palazzo Venezia and Rome gave the "Petacci clan" and those who used their relationship with Claretta for power or economic gain greater freedom of movement than in the past. This was also thanks to Petacci's contacts with Buffarini Guidi and De Cesare, two key figures in the government on whom Mussolini depended heavily when, far from Palazzo Venezia and lacking direct information, he became virtually unreachable by almost all of his other collaborators and therefore lacked the direct contact that the tabular audiences, despite their brevity and often bureaucratic nature, ensured him. It is certainly no coincidence that the *Petacci scandal* arose and became a politically significant event precisely in the months when Mussolini was ill and his meetings with Petacci, previously almost daily, became considerably less frequent. What caused it to escalate was above all the greater impunity enjoyed by Marcello Petacci and the 'Petaccians' during this period. Even those who lamented the discredit that fell on Mussolini and the regime did not have the courage, in the face of Petacci's friendships and protections and the vast network of interests and solidarity that had formed around Camilluccia, to intervene without having received explicit instructions from the

"leader" and thus run the risk of paying the price for their own "moral

There were others who, although they were in a position to speak to him, did not feel comfortable doing so at that difficult moment, so as not to put him in a position where he would have to face a problem that, in their opinion, would have caused him pain and psychological distress and made him even more prostrate. And then there were those who—considering the war to be irretrievably lost and believing Mussolini's "obstinacy" in not wanting to draw all the consequences—did not view the spread of the scandal with disfavor, thinking that it would help hasten the fall of the Duce. Mussolini's "obstinacy" in not wanting to draw all the consequences - did not view the spread of the scandal with disapproval, thinking that it would help to hasten the fall of the "Duce" and therefore had no qualms about talking about it left, right, and center and presenting it as proof of his softening and his inability to act

rationally!

From a more personal point of view, the illness had a double meaning, again in relation to his relationship with Petacci. On the one hand, Petacci's loving concern and constant care, even from a distance, throughout all stages of his illness, and her efforts to direct his treatment in the manner suggested by her father, confirmed Mussolini's belief in the sincerity of her love. On the other hand, the illness restarted

However, he also influenced his wife considerably. He made her flaws appear less serious, and in any case essentially due to her affection and concern for him, and he made her better understand her most substantial and profound qualities: her ability to go straight to the point, like a good old-fashioned Romagna woman, without hesitation or respect for anyone; her "maternal solicitude" in caring for him (and in wanting him to be cared for seriously) and in supporting him psychologically, but, at the same time, the energy, decisiveness, even harshness with which she reacted when she saw him giving up, withdrawing into himself, not making a real effort of will to react to the illness and the deterioration of the situation: "There are forty-five million Italians watching you. You've hung out the washing, now dry it... We're all on the list of those to be hanged"

If we keep these two profiles in mind, we believe we can better understand both because, from the second half of 1942 onwards, Mussolini thought about and even attempted to end his relationship with Petacci in some way, and because he did not succeed, even though he felt, especially in the last months before July 25, that she was increasingly a burden and a source of psychological and political difficulties, which, however, must have seemed secondary to him at that point: in those circumstances, with the regime falling apart and dividing into armed factions fighting each other, and with the threat of direct enemy action against the national territory looming, the *Petacci scandal* became increasingly irrelevant, becoming a piece of a much more serious and dramatic mosaic. A piece that was not really worth giving so much importance to (with the risk, moreover, that, in wanting to erase it, it would take on even more serious forms); the real issue for Mussolini was another: how to get out of the dramatic situation in which Italy was sinking and the regime was struggling. If he had succeeded, everything would have been easier for him, and even the Petacci affair would have lost much of its disruptive character.

Chapter Six

July 25: collapse of the regime and end of Mussolini's political career

Numerous notes by contemporaries, later adopted by historians, have accustomed us, as we mentioned in a previous chapter, to the image of a prostrate Mussolini, rendered incapable of real reactions and autonomous decisions by the victorious counteroffensive launched on October 23, 1942, by the British Eighth Army, which - having broken through the Italian-German lines on November 4 - would reach and occupy Tripoli in three months, and by the Anglo-American landing on November 8-12 in Morocco and Algeria and the consequent prospect of a relatively rapid invasion of the national territory by the enemy. As usual, there is undoubtedly some truth in this image, but much less than is believed. Hence the need to take the discussion further, to try to better understand the causes, limitations, and consequences of this

"State of prostration," the motivations and context—moral and political—of Mussolini's psychological attitude and behavior from the last months of 1942 onwards.

There is no doubt that the military events of the first half of November 1942 dealt a severe blow to the "Duce." Mussolini himself indirectly confirms this in *his Pensieri pontini e sardi (Pontine and Sardinian Thoughts)* when he notes that "since October 23, 1942, fortune had decidedly turned its back on me." Less clear is whether we can speak of a state of prostration that rendered him incapable of genuine reactions and independent decisions (which, of course, does not mean denying that this did occur at certain moments and that Mussolini's state of mind was, more than in the past, subject to ups and downs, to moments of discouragement and despair and to moments of irrational optimism, even if the latter were sometimes more ostentatious than real, aimed at trying to boost the morale of those with whom he was speaking or the result of his inner conflict with them) and to consider the military events of November 1942 as a sort of bolt from the blue, or almost, with which it would be possible to explain his "passivity." This is because this

"Passivity" is largely to be demonstrated and, in any case, to be reconstructed and analyzed in its manifestations with greater precision and adherence to the truth than emerges from more or less contemporary testimonies (partly biased or conditioned by a radical criticism of his political behavior, partly based on external elements) and taking into due account certain factors - such as Mussolini's state of health and its progress - which have often not been given the weight they deserve.

The breakthrough of the Italian-German defensive line in front of El Alamein was a serious blow to Mussolini, both because it put an end to his hopes of resuming the offensive towards the east once the Germans had concluded their "summer" operations in Russia, could transfer the necessary troops and aircraft to Africa, and because he was well aware of the absolute necessity, in order to block the enemy's advance, of adequately supplying and reinforcing the Italian-German army and, to this end, securing control of at least the central Mediterranean, two things that were very difficult to achieve at that time. However, it would be wrong to think that the British counteroffensive took him by surprise. Both Rommel (who at the time of the attack was spending a period of rest and recuperation in Germany, from where he returned immediately) and Cavallero had been expecting it since the end of September. Mussolini (thanks in part to information provided by the SIM) shared this belief and, in a sense, was even more drastic than they were. Cavallero's diary is clear on this point: Mussolini expected an attack in the short term "across the entire front, indeed across the entire Mediterranean theater." Certainly in Egypt (where he thought it would likely come from the south, from Kufra and the Sahara), probably in the Aegean, and later perhaps also in the west, in Tunisia. So for him, "the problem [was] therefore to reinforce the entire Mediterranean deployment." Where the "Duce" was wrong was in thinking that the attack, although predictable in the short term, would not be launched so soon and, above all, in trusting what Rommel had told him on September 24 at Rocca delle Caminate, namely that if the British went on the offensive (which the marshal said he did not believe at the time), "the deployment would be that if the British went on the offensive (something the marshal said he did not believe at the time), "the [Italian-German] forces could carry out a sufficient defensive maneuver with counterattacks on limited targets" and thus repel it. He also underestimated the possibilities and capabilities of the British and

⁽¹⁾ See CAVALLERO, *Diary*, pp. 511 ff. (October 21 and 22, 1942). Cavallero immediately informed von Rintelen of Mussolini's point of view and discussed the whole matter with Kesselring at an *ad hoc* meeting held at the German command headquarters in Taormina on October 22, which was also attended by Fougier, Girosi, and von Rintelen. See SME - UFF. STORICO,

the Americans to send supplies, men, and equipment to Egypt in a matter of weeks, making the Eighth Army a powerful military force.

Nor can it be said that Mussolini was truly taken by surprise by the Allied landing in French North Africa.

As far as we know, the Germans had received some news (in Helsinki) in September about the Anglo-American plans, but - considering a large-scale landing in winter impossible (unless it was limited to the Atlantic coast) - they had given little credence to it or had assumed that the landing would be attempted during the new year, so that, although Hitler was in favor of prompt action, the OKW, increasingly concerned about not dispersing the forces at its disposal, ended up stalling for time and postponing any operational decision. This was despite the fact that the information gathered by the Italians (mainly through the SIM and the legation in Lisbon) was more detailed, suggesting that the landing would take place in Dakar and Casablanca between mid-October and mid-November and offering a complete overview of the Anglo-American intentions and strategy-American strategy, which confirmed the reliability of the information gathered and, above all, outlined a very serious immediate future for the Axis - and Italy in particular - in the Mediterranean and for the final outcome of the conflict for Italy.

Mussolini was aware of all this and well aware of it. When the Anglo-American fleet entered the Mediterranean, he assessed the situation better than Hitler, the OKW, and Göring. While the latter, in line with their essentially military and continental perspective, believed until the very end that a landing in Sardinia or even Corsica was more likely, with the aim of establishing bases from which Allied bombers could take off to attack Germany from the south, the "Duce," while not entirely ruling out a landing in Corsica (which would have opened up the entire Tyrrhenian coast to enemy threats), immediately declared himself certain that the objective of the operation was French North Africa. As a skilled politician, he immediately understood that its purpose could not be solely to support the offensive of the Eighth Army and completely expel the Axis from Africa, nor to secure air bases as far north as possible from which to bomb Germany, but rather—more political than military, given the repercussions—to

consequences it would have had both on world public opinion and on the governments of Germany's other allies and neutral countries (and above all on Turkey¹) - to deal a fatal blow to the weakest partner in the Axis, Italy, and eliminate it from the conflict². In short, leaders who understood that the landing and conquest of North Africa were only the beginning of the attack on Italy and that, therefore, they could mark the beginning of the end for Italy and its regime.

To prevent this, Mussolini not only committed himself wholeheartedly, but was willing to do anything, ready to silence even his most vivid feelings and resentments, starting with those against the Germans and the French. On this subject, suffice it to say that on November 8, while the first landings were taking place in Morocco and Algeria, during a meeting with Cavallero and von Rintelen, he went so far as to say that if the French were to oppose the Anglo-Americans decisively, he was "ready to form an alliance with France" and shortly afterwards, to Ciano, who was about to leave for Munich to participate in talks between Hitler and Laval to clarify once and for all the French position (talks that would lead to the decision to occupy the whole of French territory and Tunisia) that if France were willing to "give loyal cooperation," it would receive "every possible help" from Italy.

We do not know how much Mussolini believed in the possibility of holding the African bridgehead. However, his decision to defend it to the bitter end, committing a significant portion of the few forces still available to its defense, is unquestionable and comes as no surprise. Apart from considerations of domestic policy, for him—as for Hitler, who was also more committed to Tunisia than he had ever been to any other overseas operation—every day of resistance in the African redoubt meant a postponement of the moment when the Allies would launch their attack on Italian national territory (just as for Hitler it meant postponing the opening of *the second front*, since, in fact, the resistance in Tunisia delayed the attack on France by a year³). And this was what mattered most to Mussolini at that moment:

Every day of war in Africa was a day gained for him ("if we don't gain time, the game is lost," he said to von ^{Rintelen} on November 12). to make a final effort to mobilize all economic resources for war production to prepare the country's defense and, above all, to try to persuade Hitler to review his war strategy and, if possible, to reach an agreement with Stalin, which, by ending the conflict in the East, would allow Germany's military weight to be transferred to the Mediterranean. At that moment, and for several months thereafter, Mussolini was the only one who believed in the need to resist to the bitter end in Africa and, more generally, to *hold out* because all was not yet irretrievably lost. Even taking into account the particular circumstances and the man's considerable modesty, it is not without significance that even

On February 1, 1943, General Ambrosio, assuming the position of Chief of Staff, spoke to his officers about the need to *persevere* ("victory is always on the horizon... it's just a matter of persevering") and, according to Ambrosio himself, the king was even more of the same opinion.

In line with this logic, while Mussolini and Cavallero immediately proceeded with the occupation of Tunisia, they also sought to contain the advance of the Eighth Army towards the west for as long as possible, so as to have time to prepare the defense of Tripolitania, turn it and Tunisia into a single defensive redoubt, and push towards the west to establish themselves in the most suitable positions to face the enemy forces coming from Algeria and to ensure the defense of the Tunisian ports and airports which, due to their proximity to Sicily, were even more than those of Tripoli the keystone of the entire defensive system being prepared. With this in mind, on November 1, Rommel was urged to provide "sufficiently prolonged resistance on the Sollum-Halfaya positions," and a week later he was ordered to defend El Agheila at all costs, "the bottleneck" through which Tripolitania could be entered from the east and, therefore, the only position that could allow prolonged resistance. Once it was taken, the defense of Tripolitania would no longer be possible, and the Italian-German forces would sooner or later have to retreat to the Tunisian *skirmish* line and, therefore, to what Cavallero bluntly called "the citadel of capitulation." At the same time, the OKW ordered three divisions to be sent to Africa, one armored, one semi-armored, and one motorized, as well as some non-division units. On the Italian side, the "Spezia" division, part of the "Centauro" division, and smaller units were sent to support Rommel's army.

The crux of the matter, however, was the difficulty of transferring reinforcements to Tripolitania and Tunisia (in the days following Germany's decision to occupy Tunisia, they arrived at a rate of ten trains per day

day) and supplies, particularly fuel, essential for Rommel to hold the field: partly due to the insufficient unloading capacity of the port of Tripoli, significantly reduced compared to the past due to a shortage of labor and, above all, equipment, which in previous months, at the request of the Germans, had been transferred to Benghazi, Tobruk, and Egyptian ports and anchorages; partly due to the activity of enemy submarines and aircraft, which was very intense and favored by the long unloading times and the lack of naval air, and anti-aircraft protection that the Italians were unable to provide, which was aggravated by the

¹ In a memorandum (No. 122) dedicated to the problem of supplying Tripolitania and the impossibility for the Navy to protect both traffic with Tunis and Tripoli, on November 29, 1942, Supermarina summarized the situation in these terms:

"For two and a half years, the light forces of the Italian fleet have been subjected to a regime of stress beyond the limits of what their equipment and personnel can withstand. Many units have been lost, both in escort service and in the direct transport of materials: 53 out of the 128 we had at the beginning of the war, while 19 have entered service. The number of units in need of urgent work and repairs is growing every day: today there are 39 out of the 94 in existence. The shipyards are no longer in a position to provide the prompt repair of so many units at once.

This wear and tear affected not only the units naturally intended for convoy service (escort vessels), but also all the torpedo boats that had been designed for surveillance and offensive actions in the Sicilian Channel and elsewhere, as well as the large destroyers of the Squadron, which were unsuitable for convoy escort due to their size and armament and, moreover, now so few in number (only 19 modern types and 7 outdated types) that they often forced the naval forces to remain immobile, as was the case with the last supply convoy to Malta, when there only four CTs present in the Ionian Sea were used for escort service or for direct transport of gasoline.

The current situation regarding ships that can be permanently assigned to escort duties (obsolete destroyers, old and new torpedo boats, escort vessels) is as follows:

Units ready 36

Units under repair 32

With 36 units, even if the destroyers of the Squadrons were continuously deployed, and even if every possibility of systematic submarine hunting were abandoned, it would not be possible to ensure sufficient protection for the traffic in progress, namely: supplies to Tunisia, Tripolitania, Corsica, Greece, Dalmatia, Albania, traffic in the Aegean, traffic of oil tankers, and fuel supplies from Sardinia to the continent.

It should be borne in mind that a naval escort to counter today's air attacks would have to be very large: the last British convoy to arrive in Malta protected four cargo ships with three cruisers and 18 destroyers and escort ships.

Our ships, on the other hand, challenge the enemy every day with, at best, two escort units each, and often fewer; many times they go without escort. But no effort, no risk has^{not} seemed excessive, and despite heavy losses, departures have continued without interruption.

The problem is made worse by the fact that the brand new fast cargo ships have almost all disappeared; only 5 of the 31 we had remain in service. Medium-speed steamers (10 knots) are also disappearing, and we have to resort to those of 8 and even 7 knots, which doubles the cost of supplies because it doubles the duration of the journey...

During this period, as at other times, the slim ships also had to provide that essential form of traffic defense known as mine barriers. It is precisely thanks to the complete barrier across the Strait of Sicily, so painstakingly constructed, that what is perhaps today the greatest constraint on the enemy's operational possibilities in all seas, namely the closure of the Mediterranean route, has been achieved. The completion and renewal of this blockade requires the use of numerous smaller units, which must always be taken from among themselves.

The problem is complicated by the shortage of fuel oil and the difficulty of getting it to all the ports from which traffic needs to depart. Thus, the lack of fuel oil in Tripoli, following the sinking of the ships that were transporting it, has contributed to delaying many movements.

It should be noted that if the current supply program is not increased

The fact that the Allies now had control of the airports in Cyrenaica and had been able to restore the ^{Malta} base to operational status. Hence the continuous and increasingly pressing Italian requests to the Germans to increase supplies of fuel oil and other fuels and to transfer to the Mediterranean a sufficient air contingent to ensure the protection of transport links with North Africa and to intervene adequately in the fighting.

On October 27, Cavallero, on behalf of Mussolini, had already pointed out to Kesselring that the enemy air threat was becoming increasingly serious and that there was an "absolute need" for greater ^{air} forces. After the Anglo-American landing and the decision not to give up the fight overseas, requests for supplies and resources for the Army, Air Force, and Navy to fill the gaps caused by shipments to Africa and strengthen coastal defenses in Italy, Greece, and the Aegean in view of new enemy actions became increasingly urgent. On November 19, Mussolini personally addressed Hitler. Referring to the need to hold the El Agheila-Marada line to defend Tripolitania and to the damage caused by the bombing of Italian cities, he asked him to send medium-caliber cannons "that can destroy American heavy tanks," 'an air force at least equal' to that deployed by the Allies in Africa and 'powerful anti-aircraft battery reinforcements'.⁵¹ The results of these steps, so co-

of fuel oil for the month of December, it is likely that in three weeks' time we will have to suspend all transport. As is well known, at this moment the battleships and most of the cruisers in the fleet are empty or half-empty.

The lack of fuel and the lack of supplies, both due to consumption for the resupply of Libya, have deprived us at the right moment of any possibility of throwing the weight of our combat fleet against the enemy naval forces operating in French North Africa, a weight that could have played a decisive role.

When forecasting traffic possibilities, it is essential to bear in mind that during the winter months, the percentage of days on which traffic is hampered by bad weather is very high, especially in the Strait of Sicily area.

Having to brave the stormy seas last week temporarily put no fewer than seven vessels out of service.

The presence in Malta of a strong fighter force, which had already proved very dangerous with the mid-low-altitude attacks by escort vessels have taken on a new dimension in recent days, making it impossible to provide anti-submarine escort for convoys in the 150-mile zone around Malta. In one week, seven Navy seaplanes and seven Armerà aircraft were lost in this way...

A fundamental factor affecting Libya's and Tunisia's supply capabilities is air power, in which the enemy has gradually gained decisive superiority. This supremacy could be countered in only one way: by resuming a powerful offensive against the air base that, due to its location, has the greatest impact on our traffic, namely Malta. Such an action, even without achieving the total effects that could have been hoped for in the past and which were temporarily achieved in part last May, would certainly have the effect of bringing the problem back to a state where a solution is possible' (AUSME, *Cavallero's Diary, November 1942, Allies*).

¹

In November, thirteen transport ships arrived in Tripoli with 32,371 tons of material (which were unloaded at a

However, the subsequent ones¹ were very modest, and even more so those relating to requests for raw materials (on January 27, 1943, during a meeting on the strengthening of the armed forces, Cavallero stated in no uncertain terms that from October onwards "there had been no improvement, indeed there had been a deterioration"²), despite the fact that, in theory, Italy had a large credit balance with Germany³.

Until the landing in Sicily, the Germans' line of conduct was characterized by great "understanding" and vague assurances, which, however, translated into an attitude marked, on the one hand, by a clear desire to reduce supplies of weapons and, even more so, raw materials to a minimum and, on the other, by constant resistance, not to say opposition, to Italy's requests to reduce its military presence in Yugoslavia and Greece and not to send new troops to Russia so as to have more forces available for the defense of the national territory on the other hand.

¹ See the extensive documentation relating to requests made to the Germans by the Italian armed forces from November 1942 to June 1943 in NAW, *Collection of Italian military records*, I.T., 170, "Supreme Command. Requests for Weapons and Various Materials (November 28, 1942 - June 6, 1943)," as well as the chronological summary of these requests, with a brief indication of their outcome, drawn up on July 16, 1943, by the Supreme Command in the form of a memorandum for the

defeated by the Germans), which the Supreme Command considered necessary for the OKW to address more urgently, in a memo (see NAW, *Collection of Italian military records*, I.T., 170), including, in addition to those of the Army, those of the Navy and Air Force and concerning all theaters, including Africa, namely:

For the Army:

tanks	no.	750
p.c. and m.c. cannons at T.M.	»	274
mobile c.c. cannons	»	288
stationary anti-aircraft guns	»	520
anti-aircraft guns	»	240
Felino radar locators	»	40
"Volpe" radio locators	»	226
anti-tank mines	»	750,000
trucks	»	7,400

For the Navy:

a) increase in submarines in the Mediterranean;

b) naphtha:

- immediate extraordinary allocation of 30,000 tons to complete ready and currently empty warships;
- monthly allocation, in addition to the quantities required for traffic and general services, which now amount to around 50,000 tons per month, of 20,000 tons for possible naval operations and to establish an operational reserve of 40,000 tons.

Once this reserve has been reached, monthly allocations will only have to compensate for consumption.

This figure includes fuel oil from Romania, the quantity of which varies from month to month.

c) Technical resources:

- 'Dete' radio telemeters	No.	43
- "Freia" devices	»	20
- metax directives	»	100
- Tag devices	»	200
- ecogoniometers	»	40
- magnetic dredging equipment		
F.F.G. (including the 26 already requested)	»	40
- dredging equipment		
(including the 50 already requested)	»	100

d) supply of nets that may be adopted for the protection of steamships traveling to Tunisia (in accordance with the agreements reached within the special Italian-German Commission);

e) small units:

- torpedo boats	no.	8
- Schnellboote	»	12
- fast minesweepers	»	30

f) torpedoes.

For the Air Force:

- 500 aircraft, of which 60% are fighters and 40% are bombers. For most of these, the Royal Air Force has the necessary personnel:

- radio locators:		
"Felino"	n.	40

On the other hand, there was an equally clear preference for providing indispensable aid not with supplies of equipment and raw materials, but by sending in combat units. As already mentioned, this line of conduct was determined by a whole series of objective and psychological, political and military reasons, as well as the hope that, in order to obtain more aid, Rome would renounce the withdrawal of Italian workers from Germany and even agree to Berlin's request to send more:

assume (almost always after making significant cuts). From two reports drawn up by the Supreme Command on May 5, 1943: it would appear that on that date, the total requests (for chessboards listed in order of priority) were as follows:

For the Army:

Weapons and materials	Total	Distribution			
		Italian Islands	Aegean	Peninsula	Greece
Tanks	1,250	450	100	350	350
P.C. and M.C. cannons at T.M.	372	108	24	156	84
Anti-ship guns	80	80	—	—	—
Anti-tank guns	1,350	718	136	224	272
Anti-aircraft guns	264	96	-	96	72
Anti-tank mines	1,500,000	600,000	160,000	400,000	340,000

part and, very often, to do so only to a lesser extent—sometimes much less—than what ^{is} theoretically ^{accepted}, and their clear preference for sending their own troops, not only to Africa (where this could be justified by the need for timely intervention) but also to Italy, other reasons must also be taken into account which, moreover, clearly illustrate the difficult point that relations between the two main Axis partners had already reached at that time.

One of these reasons was the increasingly radical and widespread distrust of Italians and their ability to use the raw materials and resources they requested promptly and rationally and, more generally, to make serious adjustments to production—even at the cost of a drastic crackdown on civilian use (among the things that most amazed and outraged the Germans were the standard of living, the availability and consumption of food and other goods by Italians) - to the needs of the war. Added to this distrust was that of the Italian armed forces and their leaders. Already alive and well when Cavallero was in command, who was highly regarded by the Germans as a military technician and friend of Germany, it became much stronger when Cavallero was succeeded by Ambrosio who, compared to his predecessor, was, as a military leader, of far greater stature.

inferior, dull, and much less dynamic (a sort of bureaucrat who, unlike Cavallero and Kesselring, rarely left Rome, so he mainly had second-hand information that was often late and inaccurate, to the point that he sometimes found himself in difficulty with Kesselring, who had timely and accurate information and who traveled constantly to Africa and around Italy to see the situation *for himself*), increasingly discouraged and inwardly focused on a "political" solution to Italian participation in the conflict and, therefore more willing to endorse the arguments put forward—especially by the Navy—to spare as much as possible the remaining Italian forces than to actually consider those of the Germans, to the point of having some serious clashes with them; in some cases fully justified (as regards German policy in Yugoslavia and the commitment that the OKW and Hitler himself demanded from Italy in that theater), on which occasions he also had the support of Mussolini, and in others that were less justified, both in view of the military needs of the moment and, more generally, if one takes into account that Italy was Germany's ally and that, willy-nilly, Ambrosio had to act in accordance with this logic and even more so because he had no real alternative at the time, so that his hesitations and resistance had no other result than to irritate the Germans, increase their distrust and suspicion of the Italians, and put Mussolini in a difficult position, making it psychologically and politically more difficult for him to try to establish a serious political dialogue with Hitler; with the aggravating factor that when he lost the support of the 'Duce', he inevitably had to give in to the arguments and demands of the Germans; this, on the one hand, increased their contempt and distrust of him and most of the Italian military leaders and, with it, the idea that Mussolini was surrounded almost exclusively by incompetents, cowards, and traitors of varying degrees. On the other hand, it reinforced their conviction that the only way to hold the Mediterranean front and avoid the risk of unpleasant surprises from Italy was to take as much control of it as possible and be present there with their own troops. This was all the more so because this presence also constituted a guarantee from a political point of view: it strengthened Mussolini's power—but also his dependence on Germany—and, if things took a turn for the worse, it would allow them to intervene promptly and avert the danger that Italy's collapse would suddenly leave the entire Mediterranean side of the "European fortress" exposed. But we will return to this in more detail in the following pages.

During the meetings Hitler held at his headquarters in East Prussia on December 18-20, 1942, with Ciano and Cavallero to discuss

assess the progress of the war and, in particular, the situation in the Mediterranean, the Führer insisted strongly on two points: that "absolutely abandon North Africa," for the defense of which he said he was ready to commit some of the "best divisions" available, and that the decisive factor in the defense—as in the entire war ("this whole war is ultimately a problem of transport") was the problem of transport, the absolute necessity of ensuring air and, above all, sea traffic between Sicily and Tunisia. If this were resolved positively

We will send our best divisions to French North Africa, and in this case Algiers will be lost and we will reach Melil. This will force Spain to change its attitude. If the transport problem is not solved, there is nothing we can do. But if we manage to solve it, England will be forced to continue routing its transports around Cape Town, to the serious detriment of its tonnage, while we will increasingly step up our submarine warfare.

"Remaining in Africa" was therefore "vital for the continuation of the war":

Shutting ourselves up in the fortress of Europe would not lead to victory in the war, while continuing operations in North Africa means forcing the enemy to risk its tonnage and reduce its yield due to the longer routes it is forced to take: in short, the result is to weaken its vital nerves, undermining its capacity for resistance... Every ton we sink from the enemy or divert from its normal supplies is of great importance to our victory. Therefore, we must not abandon North Africa. It is only a question of transport, but this is of decisive importance for the conduct of the war.

In this light, it is easy to understand how, during the technical meetings held alongside the political ones between Cavallero, his collaborators, and German military leaders, the issue most frequently discussed and in which the OKW showed the greatest interest was precisely that of communications and transport, especially maritime transport, with North Africa, their protection, and the full commitment, without sparing men or resources, that this would entail for the Italian Navy: holding the African bridgehead and

1941 for the... sale (based on a precise price list...) to the British admiral of a certain number of ships in the Italian fleet (or rather their sabotage... at half price); behind these negotiations were said to be "about twenty senior officers, eager to wrest the Royal Navy from the influence of the Fascist and German regimes," but which, with his sound common sense and direct knowledge of what a great navy was, Churchill immediately dismissed as "unrealistic."1 Refusing and rejecting such accusations is the least we can do. This does not mean denying a priori that there were cases of betrayal in the ranks of the Navy (as, indeed, in all navies) and, more importantly, that the behavior of the Navy, especially in its highest ranks—because for lower-ranking officers and crews, and in particular for those of smaller vessels, the situation is completely different—was such as to preserve it from any criticism. Historically, what matters is to understand the reasons for this behavior, how much it was determined by political and ideological considerations and how much by objective limitations and cultural and moral deficiencies, especially among the higher ranks. Only in this way, limiting ourselves to the question of the conflict between Kesselring and the Supreme Command in April-May 1943 over the Navy's commitment to the fight to maintain the Tunisian bridgehead, is it possible to assess its actual impact on Italian-German relations and understand Mussolini's attitude towards it.

In the rest of this chapter, we will focus extensively on the part that the Army, and in particular the Supreme Command, played a role in the events leading up to July 25. For now, suffice it to say that, based on the available documentation, there is no evidence that the Navy leadership played a role in these events, and everything suggests that they were deliberately kept in the dark until the very end, probably because of the poor relations between them and Ambrosio, who in the previous months had not shared their opposition to committing the fleet to battle. This - let's be clear - does not mean that the attitude of the Navy, and in particular its top brass, was substantially different from that of the Army, and that there were not many in the Navy who believed that action could no longer be postponed.

Italy's exit from the conflict. In fact, discontent in the Navy was more widespread and, especially among the higher ranks, had translated, even before the Army, into a growing awareness that Italy had lost the battle at sea and with it the ^{war}. Not to mention the

¹ In a report by the political police dated December 20, 1941, written by a Navy officer, we read:

"The psychological conditions of the Navy, which were generally not brilliant at the outbreak of war, as I have widely reported in my previous reports, have declined even further following the events of the last eighteen months. No navy can suffer such a decimation of large, medium, and small ships, both surface and submarine, as ours has suffered, without experiencing a serious material and moral collapse. This does not mean that all enthusiasm and fighting spirit has been extinguished in young people. There are certainly still many officers who would like to measure themselves against the enemy, who aspire to command units, who would like to destroy the unease in which the Navy finds itself, due to the widespread feeling in the country of its ineffectiveness and inadequacy. But there are many who are working hard to stay away from the sea and find safe places on land.

The official optimism with which the various naval operations were presented as successes may have

The lay public may be deluded (but not greatly so), but there is no naval officer who does not realize perfectly well that most of the joint naval operations carried out have been failures, many of them at a very high price, while acknowledging that there have also been numerous magnificent episodes of individual heroism. Today there is a great deal of discouragement, mistrust, pessimism, and gloom on the horizon for naval officers. If the Japanese intervention does not bring about a change in the British navy's position and an abandonment or weakening of its positions in the Mediterranean, it is generally believed that the navy has lost the game. No one believes that, under the current conditions, a mass action against the British fleet is now possible, an action that would have been possible and fruitful at the beginning of the war, such as at Capo Stilo, if our forces had been seriously and decisively committed to both daytime and nighttime action, which should have been pushed to the limit by the torpedo boats. Instead, such action was completely lacking, and the British Fleet, which had come to seek us out almost in our territorial waters, was able to retreat undisturbed.

Another missed opportunity, which should have been exploited under very favorable conditions, was that of Capo Teulada. In both cases, the balance of power was such that if our navy had really had the will to fight, it could have achieved victory. From these considerations, it is easy to conclude that the commanders were incompetent and that there were deficiencies in organization, preparation, and equipment. This ineptitude did not wait for the test of fire to become apparent to the vast majority of officers. For years, in fact, there had been fierce criticism of the way in which the Navy was led, and events have unfortunately shown how well-founded this criticism was. The admirals and commanders who deplored, for example, the criteria followed in the construction of ships, criteria that were alternately opposed and discordant, which ended up creating an extremely heterogeneous fleet, now note with deep bitterness that their criticisms were well-founded... In the technical field, there is the discouraging feeling of being inferior to the enemy even in those innovations which, although modest in themselves, greatly increase the enemy's offensive power. We refer here to the "radar locator," which allows enemy ships to locate our ships with maximum precision even at great distances, enabling them to swoop down quickly and safely on our convoys and their escorts, or to initiate precise firing even out of sight...

It is regrettable that we entered the war completely unprepared in terms of organization, without a plan for overseas expeditions in collaboration with other branches of the military. Furthermore, during peacetime, there was a lack of technical and professional training among the high command, and concepts of deployment and training, both strategic and tactical, were completely wrong because they were based on fragmentation rather than concentration of forces. Another serious deficiency, which caused very serious damage, was the total lack of coordination between land, naval, and air operations, which even led to our planes bombing our own ships...

All these errors and shortcomings can be traced back to and blamed on the man who has served as undersecretary of the Navy for the past ten years and who, even now, despite having been sidelined, continues to exert his influence in the Ministry, given the weakness of character of his successor and the many ties he maintains with his former employees, all of whom he placed in positions of greater responsibility.

Cavagnari is also blamed for having destroyed the fighting spirit of admirals and commanders during his ten years in government, mortifying their morale and prestige, depressing their character, combating every manly purpose, destroying their individuality, spirit of initiative, and enthusiasm. For ten years, in fact, a regime of arrogance, arbitrariness, terror, and absolutism reigned over the Navy.

The fact that hostility towards the Germans was even more intense in the Navy than in the Army, both because the opportunities for genuine wartime camaraderie were virtually non-existent or had been curbed by cultural models that were more influenced by the British than the Germans, and—because, in addition to the reasons for hostility it shared with the Army, it was aware of being in the Germans' sights, who on various occasions had made no secret of their belief that it harboured elements in contact with the enemy who were informing them of the movements of ships and were therefore responsible for many sinkings that had deprived the Axis forces in Africa of precious supplies and led to their defeat.

According to von Rintelen¹, by the end of 1941, the Navy had already proposed—but the Supreme Command rejected—giving up the African theater of war "before the entire merchant fleet lay at the bottom of the sea." This claim has not been confirmed and is not very credible, but it is very indicative of the Germans' attitude toward the Navy. Based on the available documentation, it can perhaps be assumed that it is

na. Every mistake, every minor deficiency, even accidental, was considered an unforgivable offense and severely punished, often even resulting in the loss of one's career. Not only that, but no expression of one's own opinion, even in the technical and professional field, was allowed or tolerated if it differed from the opinions of the deputy minister or the clique of social climbers with whom he had surrounded himself. In this way, little by little, all healthy freedom of speech and action, all spirit of collaboration, all love for one's profession, any willingness to work, all independence of spirit and character were suppressed. Those who did not bow down were eliminated. And so there remained a core of high-ranking officers whose motto became: He who does nothing makes no mistakes... What is the point of strengthening one's character, hardening one's will, nurturing a love of truth and frankness, taking an interest in one's profession, only to be crushed at the first opportunity? With this system, Cavagnari succeeded in creating a mass of amorphous officers, loyal to his will and his whims, incapable and uninterested in technical and professional problems other than those of ordinary administration, devoid of their own personal opinions, obsequious, servile: in a word, sheep. But battles are not won with sheep. And the facts are proving it" (ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General of Public Security, Political Police Division, Matters*, b. 213, phase 'R. Italian Navy').

¹ On October 9, 1942, German counterintelligence made an explicit move to denounce the inefficiency of the Navy's counterintelligence services and to make official the suspicion that Taranto was at the center of extensive espionage activity in connection with the enemy. Cavallero was immediately informed of the move and submitted the matter to Mussolini, probably also because at the transport meeting that same day, Admiral Sansonetti had stated that ships that departed suddenly were not attacked by the enemy, unlike those whose departure had been planned for some time, "which suggests espionage." (see SMEE-UFF, STORICO, *Minutes of the meetings* cited, Ili, p. 850). The day after, the "Duce" ordered the unification of all counter-espionage activities under the direction of Amé (see A. AMÉ, *Guerra segreta in Italia* cit., p. 168, and more extensively c. DE RISIO, *Generali, servizi segreti e fascismo* cit., pp. (1) 95 (19gg). - More nuanced is E. ROMMEL, *Guerra senza odio* cit., p. 186, who, referring to the fact that in 1942 the security of convoys was largely entrusted to the Italian Navy, writes that "most Italian naval officers were not in favor of Mussolini" and "therefore carried out acts of sabotage wherever they could." K. von Neurath, who at the time maintained contact between the Wilhelmstrasse and Rommel's command, went much further on May 20, 1943, upon his return from an inspection trip to Italy. Reporting to Hitler (who, moreover, was convinced that since 1939 "certain circles" in Italy, including the military, had been systematically sabotaging the war) on the situation in Italy, he assured him that "every morning from eight to ten" the *Vittorio Veneto*, anchored in La Spezia, communicated with Malta (cf. W. WARLIMONT, *Cin'ansau G. Q.G. de Hitler* cit.,

the result of an amplification and rationalization after the fact, based also on subsequent events, of what was said on January 4 and 24, 1942, by Admirals Riccardi and Sansonetti in two meetings (attended by von Rintelen and Admiral Weichold) at the Supreme Command, namely that, since the British bases in Cyrenaica posed a greater threat to communications with Libya than those in Malta, the Navy considered it appropriate to use only the western route for them and abandon the eastern one. What is certain, however, is that by the end of November, the Navy had already begun to take precautions. In a memorandum to Cavallero, Riccardi, while assuring that it would do its utmost, as in the past, "beyond all limits" to allow the flow of supplies, pointed out that its possibilities were diminishing "continuously and at such a rate that it could soon become inadequate for any task". He concluded by stating that if the Axis did not regain air superiority, "from now on it will not be possible to ensure the minimum necessary supplies to the armies in Africa." Having embarked on this course, a few days later, on December 4, the Navy argued that it was impossible to "send convoys to Tripolitania" and even to "rely on coastal traffic," and began to raise difficulties both for the possible deployment of the fleet (citing the shortage of fuel, which in the event of the use of battleships and major cruisers would have led to the suspension of traffic) and for the request to use destroyers to transport at least fuel and ammunition. This solution, which shortly thereafter - when it also and above all arose for communications with Tunisia - became increasingly, in the eyes of the Germans (and not only them, since Ambrosio also recognized at the time that, together with the use of submarines and aircraft, it was the only one to rely on) *a conditio sine qua non* for supplying and reinforcing the troops overseas and allowing them to continue the fight; but that the Navy - while acknowledging that, in the face of growing and unsustainable losses of merchant ships caused by the enemy (on Tunisian routes and in Tunisian ports, 3 ships were lost in November, 28 in December, 24 in January, 33 in February, 52 in March, 71 in April, and 43 in the first half of May), was

"It is absolutely inadvisable, from every point of view, to insist on transporting troops to Tunisia by sea"⁵ - he did not want to accept this because he did not want to put the few destroyers he still had at risk

troops to Tunisia by sea"⁵ - he did not want to accept this in order not to put at risk the few destroyers he still had at his disposal, indi-

disposable, he said, when the fleet had to be deployed. This could have been a valid argument, if Supermarina's entire behavior, starting with the transfer of the largest ships of the line from Naples to La Spezia and the cruiser group to La Maddalena in early December, and its systematic denial of the fleet's ability to engage in combat due to a shortage of fuel, did not suggest that the real reasons for the reluctance to use destroyers as rapid emergency transports were other, partly psychological, partly cultural, partly political, in relation to which the question of destroyers was only the classic tip of the iceberg.

Psychologically, there is no doubt that, after the missed opportunity at Punta Stilo, the drama of Cape Matapan, and the deployment (in September 1941) of a number of submarines, motor torpedo boats, and fast minesweepers of the Kriegsmarine in the Mediterranean, as well as the eloquent comparison between the results achieved by them and those achieved by Italy, a sense of frustration had struck.

¹ For years, memoirs and official and unofficial historical literature of the Navy attributed the limited activity of the battle fleet, first, and then the fact that from the second half of 1942 it did not take to the sea again until September 8, to a lack of fuel. Only recently has it begun to be acknowledged that this explanation is overly simplistic. As G. GIORGERINI wrote in *Da Matapan al Golfo Persico*, op. cit., pp. 520 ff., if it is true that priority in the use of fuel was given to ships assigned to escort convoys and submarines (even pumping it from the tanks of larger units in emergencies), so that "the Navy never failed to provide [them] with what little [fuel] there was," it is also clear that "it was not fuel that was a determining and limiting factor for the battle fleet: whenever it was deemed appropriate for it to take to the sea, it did so." However, the discussion cannot stop there. On the one hand, it is necessary to establish why, in the last year of the war, the Navy did not consider it appropriate to deploy the battle fleet; on the other hand, it is necessary to try to establish as accurately as possible what the Navy's supplies, replenishments (especially German and Romanian), consumption, in a word, the availability of fuel oil (for boilers and engines) were during the war and in particular in the last period of the war, and therefore the actual extent of the fuel shortage.

An approximate but fairly accurate calculation of the availability of fuel oil in the years 1940-43 can be made on the basis of data reported in the volume *Dati statistici* (Rome, 1972²) on the history of the *Italian Navy in World War II*, published by the Navy Historical Office, and data available in ACS, *Min. Marina, Gabinetto, Affari diversi (1941-1950)*, bb. 106, 199. This shows a greater availability, even in 1943, than that declared; as regards the situation at the time of the armistice, it is very likely that it was around 86,000 tons and not 58,000 as stated in *Statistical Data*, p. 277.

² For an analytical comparison and, at the same time, a detailed reconstruction of the German contribution to the war in the Mediterranean, see A. SANTONI - F. MATTESINI, *La partecipazione tedesca alla guerra aero-navale nel Mediterraneo (1940-1945) [German participation in the air and naval war in the Mediterranean (1940-1945)]*, Rome 1980. More concise is G. GIORGERINI, *Da Matapan al Golfo Persico* cit., pp. 497 ff., from which the following summary table of sinkings by the R. Marina and the Kriegsmarine is taken.

as well as by the Italian Air Force and the Luftwaffe:

Sunk units	RM		RM		RA		LW	
	No.	tons	No.	ton	No.	tons	n.	tons

...the entire Navy. Among the lower ranks and crews, this was often accompanied by a strong spirit of revenge and an equally strong sense of duty, which explains why, despite having to face the war in a condition of increasing inferiority of means, the Navy behaved valiantly and sometimes heroically. The same spirit of revenge did not animate the Supermarina leadership, which, on the contrary, fully revealed all the limitations of their culture and their technical and moral unpreparedness for a type of war that was only apparently similar to the one fought twenty years earlier (and, moreover, against an enemy that was certainly not as strong and experienced as England) and, above all, was politically and ethically on a very different level.

Convinced as they were that their task was essentially that—as we have already seen—of controlling the Strait of Sicily to prevent the reunion of the Gibraltar and Alexandria fleets and to ensure communications with the islands, Albania, Libya, and possibly the Aegean, the Navy leadership, even after Cavagnari's dismissal (which, not surprisingly, the great admiral Thaon di Revel would come to consider the greatest disappointment of his life), continued to operate according to an increasingly narrow and purely defensive perspective. This approach, especially until mid-1942, could be described as "economical" and, on the one hand, manifested itself through a constant effort to preserve its "autonomy" with respect to the other branches of the armed forces and the Supreme Command itself, as well as the "intrusiveness" of the Kriegsmarine (which was actually quite modest until early 1943), making it difficult to effectively harmonize their respective needs. On the other hand, this approach translated into extreme caution, almost a sort of fear of endangering or, worse, losing ships, therefore, in strategic passivity and a lack of initiative that inevitably often ended up infecting even the higher command at sea (which Supermarina kept under strict control and essentially did not want to collaborate with) and the intermediate officers, with the result of frustrating their spirits and often pushing them to do their duty by "getting by." This perspective explains how

- despite the value and spirit of sacrifice of a large part of the crews and the results achieved, until the balance of power became completely uneven in the defense of traffic - the strategic balance sheet was essentially negative for the Navy, and the most significant and sensational results (but, all in all, fruitless because, as Admiral Ruge wrote in his *Der Seekrieg 1939-45* and Admiral Bernotti aptly recalled even "the most beautiful tactical and operational actions, the bravura

and spirit of sacrifice remain fruitless if the strategy is deficient") were those achieved by the assault forces of the X Mas, i.e., men whose age, training, and spirit of initiative were very different from those characterizing the higher ranks.

After the "battle of mid-August" (personally desired, as we have seen, by Mussolini) and, therefore, before the British offensive in Egypt and the landing in French North Africa, the perspective of "economical" warfare had rapidly become more radical and, above all, had taken on connotations that, on the one hand, are difficult not to define as political but, on the other hand, show just how little political sensitivity and ability the Navy leadership had to grasp the profound technical and political difference between World War II and all previous conflicts and, therefore, to realize that the Anglo-Americans would certainly not have been influenced either militarily or politically by the fact that Italy still had a battle fleet at that point. In fact, the key to understanding the Navy's behavior lies not so much in the suggestion of the old theory of *the fleet in being* (which did exist), nor in the desire - as Admiral Lachinolo wrote - to preserve the battle fleet for an "extreme" action to defend the peninsula from invasion (which is more doubtful), but in the conviction of its leaders that they had - and therefore absolutely must not deplete - sufficient bargaining power to induce the Allies to offer Italy special conditions. This was a conviction that they had held since the beginning of the conflict and which, as we have already seen, underpinned the reasons given in 1940 by Cavagnari to try to dissuade Mussolini from entering the war and to argue that, in the event of intervention, the Navy should take a defensive rather than an offensive stance, as Mussolini would have wanted and as would have been logical. The words with which Cavagnari concluded his memorandum to Mussolini on April 14, 1940, speak for themselves: "Italy could enter peace negotiations not only without territorial guarantees, but also without a fleet and perhaps without an air force."

That the Navy was reluctant to commit itself fully to the defense of Tunisia and that this could lead to serious conflicts with the Germans had emerged during Grand Admiral Dönitz's visit in mid-March: speaking with Ambrosio, the new commander of the Kriegsmarine said he was greatly impressed by Mussolini's "full understanding" of "the need for closer collaboration."

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"Probable intentions of the enemy.

It is likely that the enemy will settle the Tunisian affair before undertaking new actions, but it is also possible that at the same time or immediately afterwards it will attempt a landing in Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, or the Balkan Peninsula.

The Allies do not feel directly and immediately threatened by an attack on the Italian peninsula and will not care much if it is put to fire and sword: therefore, once Tunisia has been evacuated, they will send us nothing more.

Instead, it is likely to be more interested in an attack on the Balkan peninsula and will therefore send troops and equipment there.

We must vigorously prevent the Allies from making this assessment of the Italian situation by insisting:

- so that air support may be significantly strengthened, considering that a serious threat to the Strait of Sicily originating from bases in Sicily and Sardinia would hinder traffic and indirectly defend the Balkan Peninsula, thus serving the interests of the Allies (it would be desirable to have air superiority over the Strait of Sicily);
- so that you send us promptly the tanks, weapons, anti-aircraft artillery, and materials that we have requested and that are absolutely indispensable for us to oppose enemy action.

Modalities of enemy action.

Any attempt at landing will certainly be preceded by a massive, repeated air attack on ports and airports, and will probably be accompanied by attempts at parachute drops and airborne assaults.

It is therefore necessary to hinder the aforementioned air offensive, which is only possible with strong fighter aircraft, powerful bombing of enemy camps, and robust anti-aircraft defense, which is currently very inefficient.

This is one more reason to insist on the Allies' cooperation in the field of aviation.

Under current conditions, we cannot prevent a major enemy air offensive, which will undermine our defense, significantly impairing our response capacity, already low due to quantitative and qualitative insufficiency of resources...

Defense of the Motherland.

In the current situation, with our forces and resources, we are unable to prevent a powerful air and sea landing attempt against our coasts.

Even recovering some G.U. from the Balkan chessboard does not solve the problem, because such recovery would be too late, while the threat may be very close, and because the recovered G.U. do not have weapons and means that are qualitatively suitable.

To improve, not solve, the situation, the Allies must:

- significantly strengthen the air force in Sicily and Sardinia, so that it can defend not only Italy but also the Balkans;
- send us urgently a large quantity of anti-aircraft artillery, anti-tank weapons, armored vehicles, ordinary artillery, etc., which are required to strengthen our defenses...

Defense of the Balkan chessboard.

What has been said about the Motherland in terms of insufficient defense and the need to obtain Allied assistance as soon as possible in the form of anti-aircraft weapons, anti-tank weapons, tanks, etc. can also be said about the Greek chessboard.

Recovery of divisions.

Although the recovery of divisions does not solve the problem of defense, such recovery must nevertheless be sought for obvious reasons.

- a) It is already planned to recover two divisions from Croatia, the "Sassari" and the "I-Celere," which are in need of extensive reorganization.

If we maintain the current tasks and occupation for the 2^a Army, nothing else will be recoverable. By reducing the occupation to the annexed territories, i.e., also abandoning the Narenta Valley with its mines, another two divisions could be recovered...

- b) Cede the Peloponnese to Germany and withdraw the Italian troops stationed there (two divisions)...

There are therefore a total of six divisions that could be recovered (including the "Sassari" and the "iCe-lere"), of which, however, only four could be deployed in the Motherland" (AUSSME, *Historical Diary of the Supreme Command, March 1943*, Annexes, no. 1876 bis).

The Air Force, it replied to the Field Marshal, would do its utmost to bring new troops and the necessary supplies to Tunisia, while the Navy could not risk the loss of more destroyers:

"Given the situation in the Mediterranean and the probable intentions of the enemy," and here the "Duce" made explicit reference to a possible landing in Sicily, Sardinia, and perhaps even Greece, "it is necessary to keep the fleet ready, which cannot leave without the escort of ^{destroyers}." On his return from the meeting in Klessheim, at which, as we shall see, all of Mussolini's main proposals had been explicitly or effectively rejected by Hitler and most of his requests for aid had either not been accepted or had been shelved for the time being, the "Duce" (although, during the technical meetings held in Austria alongside the political ones, the Italian side had reiterated the need to absolutely spare the few destroyers still available) seemed to show less firmness. On April 12, when Kesselring returned to the charge, instead of refusing, he replied with "we will examine it and do everything possible immediately," which could take on a very special meaning since it came after the statement that it was necessary to resist as long as possible:

If we resist, new strategic situations may arise. If we give in, the Americans and British will free up three armies plus the French divisions. *We must* resist. This must be the only thought in the minds of the people on the ground, no hope other than that of resistance [sic] until the end. In this regard, I have already given orders to His Excellency Messe

and in this brief exchange with Ambrosio:

- If we are determined, what does a destroyer off the coast of Tunisia cost?
- But afterwards, for the events to come, what will we have left?
- But we lose them anyway in the ports. And here we need to help immediately.

But a week later, he had realigned himself with Ambrosio's hardline position: as far as possible, the flow of supplies would be facilitated, but there was nothing to be done for the destroyers: "We have lost too many ships," he had told ^{Kesselring}.

Faced with this unexpected response, the field marshal—probably influenced by what was being said in the German embassy in Rome, namely that Mussolini's position had become so weak that he was unable, even more so than in the past, to raise questions of principle and refuse ^{the Germans' demands—} must have believed that the "hardening" of the "Duce" was the result of the machinations of Ambrosio and the Navy and decided to take the bull by the horns, so to speak. In the days that followed, Kesselring confronted the chief of staff twice, telling him in no uncertain terms that he had the "impression" that he was not "perfectly satisfied with his collaboration" and inviting him to say "openly whether there is trust or not": if he no longer did, he was ready to resign as commander of the OBS. Cornered by this threatening ultimatum, Ambrosio, while not giving an inch on the specific issue of the destroyers, could only try to reassure Kesselring: his "collaboration" was appreciated by all and as for trust, there was no question of that; but he could not oppose his request to go immediately to Palazzo Venezia to submit the matter again to the "Duce," who, contrary to Kesselring's hopes, did not budge an inch either. Although formally composed, the conflict between Kesselring and Ambrosio, especially regarding the Germans' opinion of the Navy, did not subside and was ready to erupt again at the first opportunity. This happened punctually in the last two weeks of the battle in

"Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow at the latest, we will run out of gasoline in Tunisia," he asked in vain for the Navy to provide, for the days necessary to bring in some merchant ships, for its transport using escort notices and submarines (see SME - HISTORICAL OFFICE, *Minutes of the meetings cited*, IV, pp. 82 ff.).

¹ Typical in this regard is the following report dated March 25, 1943, preserved in the papers that Farinacci entrusted to the German embassy immediately after July 25:

When a high-ranking German official came to inquire about the likely reaction in Italy on the part of public opinion and, above all, on the part of Mussolini to the unfolding events in Tunisia, Prince Bismarck of the German Embassy in Rome concluded:

"I don't expect any particularly embarrassing questions from Mussolini. His fleet doesn't exist, his army is problematic. Even more problematic is his future. He feels weak. He has avoided raising questions of principle in the past during his various meetings with Hitler, and it is unlikely that he will do so now. Hitler thinks and talks only about military matters, and this is not a favorable platform for Mussolini. It can be said that Hitler has made and continues to make mistakes, but he has also ended up becoming competent in military matters. Mussolini has remained an amateur. This is another reason why he keeps his comments

At this point, his position was dictated solely by the awareness that Italy's chances of resistance were now running out and that only Hitler coming to his senses could prevent its complete collapse and, at the same time, pave the way for a Tripartite victory or, more likely, a compromise peace. Today, it is easy, even natural, to say that this position was unrealistic. However, to stop at this observation is to preclude the possibility of understanding Mussolini the man and the politician, his personal intimate drama—for it is indeed a drama—his attempts, failed, but not for this reason to be considered *tout court* absurd, almost the remnants of a non-politics, of a loss of realism and political initiative, his staking everything on his own political sensitivity and ability, on his own political "genius," and on his own ability to bring about the triumph of *corrupting heresy*.

The first issue to focus on is that of attitudes towards the Germans. As we have already mentioned, a growing aversion (with real peaks of hostility) now characterized an increasingly large part of Italian society. This had been present for some time, but until Germany was on the offensive and seemed certain to win the war, it had been fairly limited and often took the form of frustration and envy of the successes achieved by the Germans, their organization, their power, and in contrast to the failures, disorganization, and weakness, and its constant need to resort to German aid. A wealth of archival documentation and a whole series of contemporary testimonies attest without a shadow of a doubt that by the second half of 1942, the breadth and intensity of this aversion had begun to grow irresistibly. The evacuation of Egypt and then the gradual loss of Cyrenaica, Sirte, and finally Tripoli itself, the collapse of the Rommel myth, the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa, the German failures in the East, Stalingrad, the tragedy of the Armir, and, again, the bombing of Italian cities and the increasing shortage of food and fuel were the most important stages and gave it a way to manifest itself and fueled it at all social levels, especially at the highest levels and in certain bourgeois circles. The inhuman, contemptuous, and sometimes even derisive behavior of the German command and troops themselves towards the Italians during the retreat in Africa and especially in Russia played a very significant role in this regard.

This state of mind, which we could define, despite its breadth, as instinctive and in some respects generic, was compounded by that of the military, and in particular the Supreme Command, which, while influenced by the more general mood, was essentially motivated by the increasingly clear awareness 1) of Italy's inability to hold the field any longer and of the fact that the more time passed, the worse its situation became, with increasing sacrifices and destruction; 2) of the difficulty, not to say impossibility, of getting out of the war without incurring German wrath (and, for some, without betraying their ally); 3) of the absolute necessity of obtaining from the Germans the aid indispensable for facing the enemy, at least for the moment; 4) the unwillingness of the Germans to truly commit themselves in this regard, preferring to limit themselves to granting only what they considered sufficient to prevent the Italian ship from sinking and them having to bear the entire burden of defending the southern Mediterranean. In this context, the military leadership's aversion to the Germans could not fail to take into account a series of practical considerations and two points of reference that it is no exaggeration to describe as obligatory: that of Mussolini and that of Victor Emmanuel III. This was because, in such an important matter, the final decision could only be made by the sovereign; the other was because, in any negotiations with the Germans, the Italian counterpart could only be the 'Duce' and only he could, perhaps, have any influence over Hitler. Because - given that no one resigns themselves to losing unless they are forced to - despite the extreme gravity of the situation, the aversion and resentment towards the Germans (and fear of them) were not yet sufficient in the early months of 1943 to make them give up hope of a reversal of the fortunes of the conflict and, therefore, of the prospect of a general negotiation that would put an end to it, or of entrusting Mussolini with the task of bringing Italy out of the conflict itself. This was a hope that, albeit in a somewhat vague form, Ambrosio himself admitted to having nurtured years later in an interview with the *Corriere della Sera*.

to die on the spot while Hungarians, Romanians, and even Germans left without warning, thus allowing our men to be surrounded - refusal to give fuel to our vehicles and hospitality on their vehicles to our men - failure to provide protection during the retreat, hoarding of huts for overnight stays - mockery of our courage by soldiers and sometimes even officers: these almost unanimous complaints from all our soldiers have created in them a state of mind that is not very favorable to the Germans, a sentiment with which the Hungarians and Romanians now sympathize, and which has already caused some incidents in Kiev and Odessa.

This contrasts with the excellent impression that many soldiers report of the Russians: the kindness of the inhabitants, shelter in the isbas and aid to the wounded, concealment of the missing, humane treatment, even on the part of many Soviet units, with the release of groups of prisoners already captured, and care for the wounded left behind.

These episodes were certainly exaggerated and contrasted [sic] by some cruelty on the part of partisans and soldiers: however, this state of mind should be borne in mind' (NAW, *Collection of Italian military records*, I.T., 4511, phase, untitled).

It is absolutely not true, he declared in 1955, that, from the very first days of my appointment as Chief of Staff, I had prepared a plan for immediate and, shall we say, forceful action. Without a doubt, I was well aware of our military situation; I knew it was desperate. But my initial hope was to be able to convince Mussolini to quickly disengage from the Germans.

And this is another key point that cannot be ignored, especially since Ambrosio's hopes were shared by others. For example, by Caviglia, who, in mid-April, wrote in his diary some considerations which, in terms of style, suggest an excerpt or partial paraphrase of what, as we shall see, he had probably written a month earlier in a memorandum he presented to Victor Emmanuel III, or rather the "project" he had alluded to a few days earlier with the Princess of Piedmont in Ninfa, and which, precisely, revolved around the idea that only Mussolini, perhaps, could resolve the situation, acting, on the one hand, on Hitler to persuade him to let Italy out of the conflict, committing itself in exchange to the strictest neutrality, and, on the other hand, by contacting the Anglo-Americans to negotiate peace with them, also on the basis of a *status* of neutrality for Italy. This idea of Italy's "neutralization" was one that Caviglia himself believed to be highly unlikely to succeed, and which cannot fail to leave one astonished and incredulous given its naivety and unreality, but which nevertheless circulated for a long time in various circles and so-

especially in military circles, and not only in the early months of 1943, but also after the Allied landing in Sicily and even after July 25, when *dovette addirittura costituire, almeno in un primo momento*, "Up his sleeve" with which Badoglio (and perhaps also Acquarone) believed he could resolve the situation. However, this idea must always be kept in mind in order to understand some of the main inconsistencies of the whole affair of July 25 and, first and foremost, the absolute lack of political sense and clear prospects in the attitude of the military towards Mussolini and the problem of the armistice: if, in fact, the objective was the 'neutralization' of Italy and Mussolini was considered the only one who could obtain Hitler's *approval* and guarantee him respect for neutrality for the time being, he certainly could not be dismissed...

Even before being appointed Chief of Staff, Ambrosio—it is difficult to say whether he was already thinking of a possible way out of the conflict or simply sounding out the mood and ^{intentions}—had been in contact with various figures outside the regime, including Caviglia and ^{Bonomi}, and, after his appointment, had worked to place trusted men in certain key positions: General Hazon as commander-in-chief of the Carabinieri, General Sorice as undersecretary for war (so as to prevent a possible attempt by fascist extremists to install one of their own representatives, apparently Alessandro Melchiori, in Via XX Settembre instead of a military officer), and General Rosi as chief of staff of the army, a position he had vacated. Some of his closest collaborators, in particular General Castellano, who was essentially his right-hand man, had taken it upon themselves to maintain contact with Ciano and other fascist representatives known for their anti-German sentiments. This does not mean, however, that apart from the conviction that "energetic and decisive action towards the Germans" and "the repatriation of divisions located beyond the border" were necessary, two points on which Mussolini also agreed, Ambrosio had clear ideas about what to do, let alone a plan of action. Nor, on the basis of the available documentation, can we say that Castellano's ideas were any clearer. He was certainly more intelligent, active, and open-minded than his boss, but this did not make him any more capable of politically managing such a complex and dangerous situation.

take the offensive in the east again that year and his request to have "our say on these plans, because our situation depends largely on the general situation":

he is aware of Germany's intention to renew its offensive against Russia. He is convinced that this is a mistake. If the Russians cannot resist, they will not allow themselves to be pinned down and will attack again as winter approaches.

It is likely that he learned that—contrary to what he had believed (and with him many others who also held important positions in the state apparatus and the regime)¹ - the "Duce" was fully aware of the gravity of the situation and shared almost all of the assessments of the Supreme Command, and at the same time, realize the complete absence in the military leadership not only of precise ideas, but also of that minimum of political sensitivity and realism indispensable for being able to think of a

"political solution" with the Germans at home, led Pietromarchi to view Mussolini's behavior less critically and skeptically, particularly his efforts and balancing act, on the one hand to keep the Germans at bay as much as possible without reaching a crisis with them and, indeed, trying to obtain as much help from them as possible, and on the other hand to convince Hitler to rethink the political-military strategy of the war. What interests us here, however, is not so much Pietromarchi's personal position (even though he would have played a significant role in subsequent events, especially those surrounding the armistice), but rather understanding that of Ambrosio and Castellano, its evolution over time, and its clarification with regard to the issue of Italy's exit from the war and, therefore, with regard to Mussolini.

Unlike Cavallero's diary, Ambrosio's diary is little more than a list of meetings and encounters, rarely providing any summary indication of the topics discussed. Nor, unlike Castellano, did Ambrosio write anything about the period in question after the war. As for Castellano's books, which are interesting for some details and admissions that were counter-current at the time, they do not allow us to truly specify the evolution of the Supreme Command's position and the actual link between its *military and political* aspects, since the reference to the disappointing results of the Klessheim conference of April 7-10 is

too generic and unreliable. The only note of some interest is that relating to the difference of opinion that, according to Castellano, existed between him and Ambrosio on the question of the attitude to be taken towards Mussolini (and implicitly towards the sovereign) in order to reach an armistice with the Allies.

On this subject, Castellano wrote in his first book¹ - we had different ideas.

Ambrosio was convinced that it was necessary to break with our ally and conclude an armistice with the enemy, but he wanted Mussolini himself to take this step. I was equally convinced of this necessity, but I believed that Mussolini would never come to such a conclusion, both because he did not have the courage to speak to Hitler in such terms and because it would have meant his end.

For this reason, I reiterated the concept that the Head of Government had to be eliminated even without receiving orders to do so. Ambrosio did not follow me down this path, of course, as he would never have taken such a decision without higher approval.

Based on the available documentation, the only point of reference is practically constituted by the memos that Castellano agreed with Ambrosio, sent to Mussolini and the sovereign, and above all those he wrote for ^{Ambrosio} himself. These show that when Ambrosio succeeded Cavallero as Supreme Commander, although he did not hide the extreme gravity of the situation from Mussolini, he did not consider it (or at least did not present it as) totally hopeless: the important thing was that the Germans adopt "an economical defensive line" on the eastern front that would allow them to contain the Russians' summer offensive and exhaust their forces and, at the same time, "economize resources to the advantage of other theaters of war, and more precisely to the advantage of the Mediterranean theater." If, in fact, the Germans had been convinced "once and for all" of the importance of the Mediterranean for them too, and had satisfied Italian requests for materials, to withdraw part of the forces stationed in the Balkans, and to strengthen the German air and submarine presence in this theater, something could still be done.

If the Germans abandon the idea of an offensive and no longer think about Stalingrad and the like, Castellano wrote on February 17 in a "note for the

was submitted to him in 1944 by Ambrosio from the Commission of Inquiry for the failure to defend Rome, during which Ambrosio postponed to "towards the end of April" the moment when, convinced of the impossibility of persuading Mussolini to break away from Germany, "began to demonstrate to the Sovereign the situation not only from a military point of view but also from a political point of view" (1. PALERMO, *Storia di un armistizio* cit.,

Duce" \ - they will have a good chance of defeating the enemy in the East; if we succeed in crushing the Anglo-Saxon landing attempts, the military situation of the Axis will be greatly improved. Along with this improvement, the failure will undoubtedly produce a moral crisis in the enemy camp that we will be able to exploit.

In conclusion: the Germans must change their operational plans and help us, otherwise we will no longer be obliged to follow them in their misguided conduct of the war.

From this "realistic" perspective, even the Supreme Command believed that Tunisia should be held for as long as possible, so as to delay further enemy action, wear them down, and depress their morale, thereby gaining time to persuade the Germans to agree to Italian demands. This, at least, is what emerges from the "notes" addressed to Mussolini, which it is difficult to imagine did not largely correspond to the thinking of the Supreme Command and Ambrosio in particular.

From the memos addressed to Ambrosio, it appears that Castellano only began to speak more explicitly and cautiously about the opportunity to withdraw from the war at the beginning of the second ten days of March.

The conclusion is painfully serious, he wrote to him on March 11 at the end of a bleak assessment of the military situation. Our capacity for resistance is very weak today and will be even weaker tomorrow.

If the Anglo-Americans exert their greatest effort against us, we will not be able to resist. The chests of our soldiers will not stop the enemy's tanks, just as our naval forces will be powerless against those of the enemy, and our air force will be overwhelmed by the infinitely superior numbers of the enemy.

In such conditions, we must assess whether our sacrifice will be useful for the final victory.

Only in this case will it be our duty and in our interest to endure it.

But if this is not the case, the homeland cannot ask its children to commit suicide; instead, it will ask them to save themselves from destruction.

And in any case, it did so by always attributing responsibility for any decision in this regard to the Germans and their stubbornness in wanting to resume the offensive in the east. Even admitting that by the end of the summer they had managed to bring down the Russian colossus, what would have happened in the meantime? In fact, in another memo dated April 16, it reads:

Subsequent to the Klessheim conference, and much more explicit¹ - on other fronts?

It is not permissible to stray beyond a certain limit in the world of rosy hypotheses, and for this reason it is not plausible to believe that after the great summer battle the ally will still be strong enough to oppose a full-scale attack that will, at that time, have taken hold in Europe. The clash with the new enemy on land cannot be effectively sustained until after a reasonable period of reorganization, i.e., practically in the spring of 1944. During this long period, the Anglo-Americans will have established themselves on the continent and gained positions of dominance against which the fight will become unequal.

This is a war of machines, and when our adversaries have poured the products of their war industry, whose costs are simply astronomical, into any part of Europe, they will have created an imbalance of resources that will crush Germany, which has not yet recovered from the losses of the Russian campaign. It will be above all air superiority that will bring about this imbalance, not only because the enemy air force will dominate the battlefields, but also because it will have destroyed German sources of production in the meantime.

In addition to victory in the East, the Germans are counting on the results of the war. And on this subject too, it is now time to face reality.

If the Anglo-Americans were able to withstand the underwater war in 1942 and carry out the enormous maritime effort of transporting two fleets to Africa, however much the Germans may intensify their fight against traffic, there is no doubt that, with the increased pace of construction and the ever-improving anti-submarine warfare equipment, our adversaries will find themselves in better conditions from now on. In fact, even if the total number of sinkings remains at the same level as last year (12 million tons), since our enemies' production output in 1943 is around 13 million tons, it is to be expected that the Anglo-Saxons will not only be able to make up for their losses, but also achieve a surplus of about one million tons.

Added to this is the new development, which will have enormous strategic and naval consequences, of the conquest of Tunisia.

With Tunisia conquered, the danger of Italy being directly attacked would become "imminent," and there was no hope of "powerful and commensurate with the needs of our defense" from Germany, so that "we cannot delude ourselves into thinking we can drive the enemy back into the sea because, having lost the battle on the coast, it is materially impossible to subsequently defeat an adversary rich in mechanized means and master of the air." And if, "in dire straits, the Germans might come to our aid," Italy would in the meantime have been invaded and transformed into a bloody battlefield.

Allies in view of an armistice. And he did not even move in mid-May, when he learned that Mussolini had bluntly rejected the overture made, as we shall see, by the Holy See to let him know that the pontiff was willing "to do everything possible to come to the aid of the suffering people." Nor did he ever seriously consider staging a coup to remove Mussolini. Some of his remarks, such as the one to General Puntoni on March 13, about the advisability of "forcing the Duce to step down and make way for new men," namely Badoglio, should be understood, on the one hand, as attempts to sound out the intentions of the sovereign.

¹ According to G. CASTELLANO, *Come firmai l'armistizio di Cassibile* cit., pp. 38 ff., "one day," after the Klessheim conference, Ambrosio, "returning from talking to Mussolini, thoroughly disgusted by his ignorance and stubbornness, by his repeated refusal to take decisive action toward the ally, concluded that: 'Nothing would be achieved with that man.

- All that remains is to get rid of him,' I said, 'but for that we need to prepare ourselves properly.

- "Very well," he replied, "draw up a plan for me."

My plan, typed by Lieutenant Colonel De Francesco, consisted of three parts: the first listed the measures to be taken in advance to deal with any fascist reaction; the second part outlined the steps to be taken to capture the leader and his most dangerous followers throughout Italy; and the third part outlined the military measures to be taken to counter a likely German reaction.

Ambrosio approved the memo, kept it in his pocket for twenty-four hours, and returned it to me saying that for the moment we should limit ourselves to implementing only some of those provisions, specifically to give general guidance to the peripheral commands on a "possible disturbance of public order."

So, on several occasions, I went to Turin, Milan, and Trieste, where I conferred with the Territorial Defense commanders

(who, in this specific case, had received Badoglio a week earlier after more than two years of interrupted relations) and, on the other hand, as the immediate result of Castellano's pleas. Ambrosio never had to think about acting on his own. And, mind you, not only because he would never have overruled or forced the hand of the sovereign, but also because, thinking of the reactions that Mussolini's dismissal and the conclusion of an armistice would provoke on the German side, he always aimed - until, upon his return from the conference in Feltre, he was informed of the sovereign's decision to take action - on the disengagement from the Germans by Mussolini himself. This idea, it is worth repeating, was shared not only by numerous fascists, but also by other loyal servants of the monarchy whose behavior was guided not by personal ambition, but by what they believed to be in the best interests of the country. A typical example is Senise who, when informed by Acquarone of Vittorio Emanuele III's decision, complied with it, but did not hide his view that it was, all things considered, hasty:

As my personal impression, - he would write a few years later² , - I observed that the decision was perhaps belated, since there were significant German forces on the peninsula which, if we had not been able to drive them back beyond the Brenner Pass, would have put Mussolini back in power and captured or killed the Sovereign and the new Government. In order to strike a blow against fascism, it would have been necessary, in my opinion, to first have sufficient military forces of our own and of the Allies on the peninsula, otherwise there was a risk of worsening an already serious situation.

As things stood, it seemed to me that we should not overlook the possibility of leaving it to Mussolini himself, who had been responsible for our entry into the war, to find a way out of it without provoking a terrible reaction from Germany.

And everything suggests that Acquarone himself initially (until he realized its impracticability and the dangers that the credit it enjoyed, combined with the absence of instructions from Victor Emmanuel III to make contact with the Allies, could pose to the prestige and authority of the sovereign) had agreed with it and considered it "the ideal solution" from all points of view, including the internal one and

on how to resolve the Mussolini issue. Significant in this regard is a remark he made during a long conversation with Vitetti on June 9: "It would be too good if Mussolini broke away from Hitler, because that would avoid any measures against him, and we could then ^{quietly} get rid of him." This remark, like the entire course of the conversation, can be interpreted in various ways: as essentially dictated by regret at the impossibility of carrying it out and by a desire to sound out Vitetti on the credibility it had at Palazzo Chigi and in military and anti-fascist circles with which he was in contact; as an attempt to find out indirectly whether Bastianini had already begun sounding out the Allies; and also as a consequence of the fear that, at the decisive moment, difficulties might arise over the "measures" to be taken against Mussolini and how to "get rid of him," since the Minister of the Royal Household knew full well that the most radical elements of Ambrosio's *entourage* those who wanted the chief of staff to take action and were urging him to act and make contact with the Allies before they landed in Italy, even without orders from the sovereign, did not rule out, if necessary, killing Mussolini, a solution that Acquarone must have known that Victor Emmanuel III would not have approved, much less authorized. This remark also shows how widespread this idea was, despite its absurdity (since it should have been clear to everyone that both

Germany or the Allies to even consider it), the idea of a "painless" withdrawal of Italy from the conflict on the basis of its commitment to assume a position of strict neutrality between the two contenders.

The only person who never thought that the Germans and the Allies would accept this idea was the "Duce." Before discussing his position, however, it is worth concluding the discussion on the military leaders. The position that Ambrosio held until essentially the eve of July 25 was to strengthen and try to make his demands to the Germans strategically acceptable, asking them to consider the Mediterranean the most important and decisive front for the Axis, to commit themselves fully to it and to give Italy all the aid it requested, and, at the same time, to press Mussolini to support this strategic vision and Italian demands with the utmost energy with Hitler, in fact became, as we shall see, a sort of subordinate within the position of the "Duce," the one in which he placed his hopes for a certain time. And again, because if the position of Ambrosio and the Supreme Command was not influenced by that of Mussolini, or was only influenced in general terms, the same cannot be said for that of the sovereign. But here too, with an important clarification: not because the latter interfered with the former, but because in practice Vittorio Emanuele III—another figure who never embraced the idea of escaping the war through the "neutralization" of Italy—kept Ambrosio in the dark until the eve of July 25 about what he was thinking and how he intended to proceed, so that Ambrosio found himself in the worst possible position, having to anticipate all eventualities in theory but unable to do anything and, at the same time, having to restrain those among his collaborators who, in such a situation, would have liked him to take the initiatives that the sovereign was not taking and who, out of impatience and disappointment, restlessness of character, and personal ambition, were moving in all directions to establish connections with all sorts of opponents, fascists and anti-fascists, with the sole result of further weighing down the political climate and increasing the Germans' suspicions and alarms about the Italian situation.

That Ambrosio was a "gentleman," albeit a bit simple-minded ("he says what he thinks, but this approach is not always a good one," the king once commented to Puntoni) and a "good soldier," but much less intelligent than Cavallero ("Ambrosio does not have a tenth of Cavallero's ingenuity," Acquarone said of him to Pirelli a few days after his appointment, and it is not certain that the opinion of the Minister of the Royal Household did not reflect that of Vittorio Emanuele III), over whom he had the advantage of not being involved in politics, and inferior to the task he had had to take on with the no-

Mina as Chief of Staff was almost ^{unanimous} and, all things considered, not unjustified. So much so that his critics went so far as to say that Mussolini had chosen him because, lacking in ability and prestige as he was, he could not cause him any difficulties. This was a completely unjustified insinuation: the choice of the "Duce" (who, at least since the attack on Greece and the perhaps even more traumatic disappointment caused by Graziarelli's behavior in Cyrenaica, no longer had confidence in his generals) had fallen on Ambrosio because, as Chief of Staff of the Army, he was the most natural and welcome choice for the military leaders with whom Mussolini did not want to have any difficulties at that time. nor, on the other hand, could he have been displeased by the fact that Cavallero's successor was animated by a strong sense of responsibility, was not willing to passively submit to the will of the Germans, felt strongly and considered his relationship with the sovereign and his loyalty to him to be a priority over any other relationship or loyalty, and had no ambitions of his own, so he offered ample guarantees that he would do nothing without the explicit instructions of the sovereign himself; and, as we shall see, Vittorio Emanuele III was one of the very few people in whose "sense of responsibility," "patriotism," and "loyalty" to him Mussolini now placed his trust, so that as chief of staff Ambrosio was the best he could have hoped for in those circumstances.

Despite these positive aspects, Ambrosio's presence at the top of the armed forces also had, in theory, a negative aspect, represented by the ^tower^ that had quickly formed around the new chief of staff. We are not referring so much to Sorice, who was certainly, along with Roatta (who only became a full member of the group at a later stage and was disliked by his younger colleagues), the most morally upright and responsible member, but rather to Castellano, undoubtedly the most intelligent and long-time close collaborator of Ambrosio, and above all to the former head of the SIM, Carboni, who, thanks to his previous relationship with Castellano and having given the impression that he had played a decisive role in the appointment of Ambrosio (through Ciano, with whom he had been in contact for some time, but who in this circumstance had played no role, Mussolini having already independently decided on Ambrosio), was accepted into the Supreme Command in March. Different from each other in many ways, Castellano and Car-

Boni shared a strong activist spirit and, above all, great open-mindedness and ambition. Carboni was also politically active, so much so that when the Badoglio government was formed, he sought to be appointed Minister of Popular Culture and did not disdain, as he had been in contact with both fascist and anti-fascist liberal-democratic circles, to establish contact with the communists. According to these men, as we have already said, Ambrosio should have exerted massive pressure on the sovereign to induce him to initiate contacts with the Allies in order to conclude an armistice before they landed in Italy and, at the same time, preparing a coup d'état to get rid of Mussolini and fascism. If the king continued to not take a position and just listened quietly to what he was being told or, worse, took a negative position, he should have acted on his own. All this, moreover, without having any clear ideas on how to achieve it and almost completely underestimating the risks involved. This helps to explain why, in practice, *the entourage* managed to influence Ambrosio relatively less than is often claimed. This was partly due to his culture and education, partly to his strong monarchist sentiments, partly to his "sense of responsibility" (heightened by the dual conviction that in the event of a coup d'état, the fascist reaction and communist initiative would have been much greater than they actually were in the aftermath of July 25), and partly because he was aware of the grave danger posed by the presence in Italy of a vast German political-police and military network capable of intervening promptly at the first sign of "betrayal" on the part of Italy, Ambrosio, despite growing pressure and incitement from Castellano and Carboni, did not go beyond, on the one hand, exerting discreet pressure on Vittorio Emanuele III (presenting him with a realistic picture of the gravity of the military and internal situation and expounding some of his *personal* ideas, such as that, once Mussolini had been eliminated, rather than setting up a political or even *administrative* government, a military dictatorship should be established "headed by Caviglia or Badoglio") and, on the other hand, cultivating a series of contacts with Caviglia, Badoglio, and some members of the fascist opposition and anti-fascists, even though everything suggests that he shared Acquatone's negative opinion of the latter² and therefore did so not because he considered them

represented a real force with which it was wise to come to terms, but in order to understand their intentions, control them, and prevent any rash initiatives on their part from precipitating the situation prematurely. Ambrosio did not go any further than that. This was all the more so because, until the moment of the landing in Sicily, he himself—and not only he, but at times also ^{Castellano}— must have secretly thought, or at least hoped, that the military situation might turn out to be less dramatic than it appeared and that, if the Anglo-Americans did not attack very quickly and the Germans were persuaded to effectively support Italy, if not to review their

"made up of the remnants of liberal Italy," on June 9 Acquatone replied bluntly: "You don't know these anti-fascists; they are weaklings, and they have only one desire, which is to take over the government, after which the country will be thrown into chaos. I have seen some of them and they made a disastrous impression on me. We must get out of the war, but we must not end up like Russia, and these old parliamentarians are very weak" (see DDI, s. IX, X, p. 535).

¹ A memo to Ambrosio di Castellano dated May 21 is characteristic in this regard. In it (See NAW, *Collection of Italian Military Records*, I.T., 1154/2, "Supreme Command. Operational Memorandum Gen. Castellano.")

global strategy, all was not lost. Indicative of this is a "note for the Duce" dated ^{June} 18¹ which reads:

The enemy has not yet begun any real air operations in preparation for the attack. The bombing of airfields and ports on the islands has so far been aimed at preventing us from using them as bases for air and naval operations in the Sicilian Channel, and therefore today they are more widespread in Sicily than in Sardinia precisely because of the purpose they serve. The same reasoning explains the relentless attacks on Messina and Reggio, because the Strait is vital for supplies to the island; bombing the passage weakens not only the island's defenses but also the offensive capacity of our forces against bases in Africa and on the Mediterranean Sea.

For now, we cannot attribute any other meaning to those bombings.

Therefore, if we want to draw a logical conclusion from the three elements of assessment: the massing of landing craft, the deployment of troops, and the preparations for the attack, we must conclude that, for now, no reliable predictions can be made in any field.

If, on the other hand, we look at the overall strategic situation and consider the difficulties of the landing operation and the objectives that the enemy may be aiming for, our reasoning leads us to believe that:

- A landing on the Italian islands and southern coasts of the peninsula cannot be ruled out; but apart from doubts about its success, this attack would have a purely local effect and would not give the enemy an immediate and strategic result that would profoundly affect the final outcome of the conflict.
- An attack in Provence (the bases in Sardinia can be neutralized and there is no need to occupy the island) or in the Balkans (the Ionian and Aegean coasts) is more likely because: from Provence, Germany is seriously threatened by air, and from the Balkans, Romania's oil reserves are threatened. These are truly profitable objectives.

It should also be considered that the enemy:

- 1) - knows the value of our soldiers and overestimates our defenses;
- 2) - he understood that Italy would not give in, even if a small part of our territory were temporarily occupied;
- 3) - It cannot suffer defeat because the Americans would immediately leave Europe, concerned as they are about the Pacific. In fact, this curious situation would arise: America, which came to England's aid in Europe, if defeated in Europe, would have to ask England for help in its war in the Pacific, and in the end England would once again dominate the world, which America cannot allow;
- 4) - He needs to act quickly because public opinion in England and especially in America is already showing signs of impatience.

In conclusion: it is still too early to formulate reliable hypotheses; we must remain calm and keep our nerves in check, but *we must not waste a minute in strengthening the defense of our islands and the most exposed coasts*, facing the danger head-on.

which for us is an attack on Italy, and consider it very imminent so that we are ready to face it at any moment.

And that this was not merely a matter of form is proven by the fact that on July 7-8, speaking with Alberto Pirelli, Ambrosio stated that "in Sicily we are *almost* ready"¹ and, broadening the discussion to the general situation of the Axis and the impossibility of convincing Hitler not to resume the offensive in Russia, he defined submarine warfare as "our only hope"²: a very strange definition coming from someone who was now truly convinced of the inevitability of defeat and the absolute necessity of getting out of the war.

As a military man, Ambrosio certainly cannot be described as a "war genius"; politically, he was virtually non-existent; however, his Piedmontese common sense and realism were sufficient—these are things we have already mentioned, but it is worth repeating them in order to clarify his position and, more importantly, his behavior as chief of staff and his attitude toward the Germans—to make him understand that Castellano and Carboni did not have any clearer ideas than he did and that, if he listened to them, the chances of avoiding a real tragedy for the country would be very slim. Hence his caution, his desire to avoid missteps that would precipitate relations with the Germans, whom he knew to be very attentive to Italian affairs and very concerned about their possible "negative" evolution, to the point that today we know that the OKW (which had long considered the possibility of an Italian defection) began, as soon as Tunisia fell, to

prepare two *ad hoc* counter-operations, "Alarico," to occupy Italy, and "Costantino," to secure control of the Balkan regions occupied by ^{the Italians}. This prudence was accompanied by a *professionalism and patriotism* that may be difficult for us to understand today, but which were alive and well and which, in the absence of orders to the contrary from the sovereign, led him to do his *duty* as chief of staff and as an Italian in the best possible way and, even at that point in the war, not to give up completely on the idea or, at least, the hope that there might still be a very small chance of coming out of it, if not victorious, then at least not defeated, and that in any case it was necessary not to burn his bridges prematurely and let the politicians - namely Mussolini, as Ambrosio never considered anyone else capable of managing relations with the Germans - do their part, their *duty*, as he did his. From this point of view, the person who understood the terms of the question well was a colonel of the Wehrmacht General Staff who came to Italy on a special mission in June, O. Berger; In a report to his superiors on June 23, he wrote that it was "not even worth talking about disloyalty on the part of the army's high command towards the Duce; as long as the Royal House remains loyal to him, there is no need to fear any rift between the officer corps and the Duce."

If you don't fully understand Ambrosio's attitude, you won't understand... nor does one run the risk of misunderstanding—as in some cases even Deakin does—his behavior as chief of staff. In particular, the profound meaning of his firmness toward the Germans, his efforts to obtain as much aid as possible from them and the withdrawal of at least part of the Italian forces engaged in the Balkans (and, therefore, his refusal to change his line of conduct with regard to Mihajlovic's resistance movement) and his staunch commitment to the defense of Tunisia (until its cost became unjustifiable not only in terms of the human and material losses it entailed, but also in terms of the time it could secure for a more effective defense of the national territory

both in the preparation of defensive measures and forces that would have had to face a highly probable enemy attack on the national territory. Not to mention the particular nature of his relationship with Mussolini. A relationship full of light and shade, trust and mistrust, hope and despair, but all in all loyal and based on some fundamentally shared premises.

We have discussed some of the most significant events and moments in Ambrosio's work and that of the Supreme Command in relation to the Germans in the previous pages and in the third chapter. Deakin's reconstruction of these events is also available, to which much could be added, if desired, could be added thanks to Italian military documentation that has since become available, but which, except for matters of minor importance, remains valid and more than sufficient for those who, like us, do not intend to retrace step by step the Italian-German military relations, but only to grasp their substance and impact on political relations and on the evolution of the Italian situation and Mussolini's position.

From this perspective, it is sufficient to emphasize that, as far as the requests for aid, on the Italian side, full confirmation of what the meetings in Rome in previous months with Ribbentrop, Warlimont, Göring, and Dönitz had already made clear came in April in Klessheim: the Germans had no intention of granting effective aid and, if they were forced to do so, they would only do so *in extremis and*, in any case, by sending their own organic units rather than larger quantities of raw materials, supplies, and weapons. Their aim was not so much to help an ally in difficulty in whom they no longer had confidence (so much so that the OKW tended, as Ambassador von Mackensen and Admiral Fricke had advocated since 1941, to extend its control over the Italian armed forces and possibly even place them under its own command and, in the face of firm Italian resistance, to make at least the OBS de facto autonomous from the Supreme Command) and towards whom they harbored, starting with Hitler (who, while still saving Mussolini in some way and considering the problem of his personal protection³ was nevertheless convinced that his 'best intentions' were systematically sabotaged by his closest collaborators and by that 'bunch of corrupt people' who, in his eyes, were 'the leaders of the armed forces and the state'⁴), a profound contempt, to guard against the risk of his collapse and a

his defection. Typical in this sense is a long outburst by Hitler on the evening of March 4, 1943, during one of his regular meetings at headquarters to take stock of the situation on various fronts with his closest aides. The minutes of the meeting are unfortunately among the most damaged, but they nevertheless convey both the substance of Hitler's position and the state of mind that fueled it. When the Italian requests for additional supplies to those already presented previously and intended to replenish weapons and materials lost or sent to Africa were discussed, the Führer immediately launched into a series of considerations that are worth more than any of our words:

for these units, which could be adequately armed, so that they would represent support for him even at home. If he can initially count on four divisions of this kind, then he can assert himself and gradually begin to dissolve certain miserable divisions of the army or replace the officer corps [...] and thus gradually bring about some improvement [in the situation. But if he does not have such support], he cannot do anything. [This is in] our interest. If in North Africa [...] [there had been even fewer] units, but they had been fascist, trained and organized by us, it would have been better than with four of those divisions [which, due to] the incompetence of their commanders and their [...] at the first cannon shot, they cut and run [...] He also told me that wonderful things can be observed among the people [...] in the masses, but that he was unable to [...] choose [...] they are wavering [...] they have no zeal for service. The officers have no sense of responsibility, but think of only one thing: going to the café.

As soon as he returned from Klessheim, Ambrosio submitted a memorandum to Mussolini stating that it was clear from the talks held with the Germans that they continued to consider the Mediterranean theater

"of secondary importance" and that their decision to "hold Tunisia at all costs" was essentially dictated by the desire to "tie up the enemy's forces for as long as possible" and that, despite the pressure exerted on them, the aid they would provide for the time being would be modest overall, much less than that requested, given that TOKW was opposed to "devoting available resources to theaters that are not currently active in anticipation of an attack" and said he was willing

"to provide all possible assistance" only in the event of landings in Sardinia and Sicily.

This line of conduct, combined with news filtering out of Berlin about Germany's inability to fight on two fronts and that, with

At the end of April, the OKW resigned itself to considering Tunisia defensible only for a short time, due to the decrease and growing irregularity of supplies (especially raw materials) that the Germans had committed to deliver and, *last but not least*, concerns about public order after the strikes in Turin and Milan, this caused strong discontent in military circles, with peaks of real resentment and sometimes hostility not only towards the Germans but also towards Mussolini, who was considered, on the one hand, the primary cause of the situation in which Italy found itself and, on the other hand, incapable of finding a way out of it and an obstacle to those who wanted to do so.

According to ^{Deakin}, in the last ten days of April, this discontent was the determining factor in the "emerging opposition" within the Supreme Command to Mussolini and the "entire structure of his personal government." In support of this, he cites a "minute of proceedings" without a heading or signature, dated May 2, bearing Bastianini's initials and referring to the emergence "among the leaders of the armed forces" of a "common attitude," often violent, against Mussolini and Kesselring. In our opinion, however, Deakin's argument is overly simplistic, even misleading. First of all, because it does not distinguish between generic military "opposition," even among the high ranks (moral, emotional, unrealistic, it matters little here), which is politically devoid of concrete possibilities, and "opposition" of the Supreme Command in the proper sense, which, in turn, must be seen in its various forms and gradations and, above all, in the only key that is actually important: that of the relationship with the sovereign. Secondly, establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between the conclusions drawn from the course of the Klessheim conversations and the deterioration of the situation in Tunisia on the one hand and the emergence of military opposition on the other is to postdate the latter by about five months and to preclude the possibility of truly understanding the mechanisms and internal processes that characterized it. Thirdly, the document on which Deakin bases his argument is not, as he believes, a 'draft report', i.e. an official document, but confidential information (perhaps not even written by an Italian, as some terms suggest it was written by a foreigner) submitted to Bastianini for his information and signed by him after reading it. The only thing we consider important about the document is that it reflected, on the one hand, the differences of opinion, the controversies, and the more or less hidden resentment of the Navy towards the Army and the Supreme Command and, on the other hand, the confusion that reigned among the "opponents," to the point that its author went so far as to hypothesize that

they could even act "in agreement with some German elements" hostile to Kesselring, who at that time was, for better or worse, the least hostile to the Italians and the most inclined to meet their demands in part. This was all the more so given that, albeit *ex silencio*, the alleged

"minutes" suggest that the discontent of the "opponents" was not limited to She was not only against the field marshal and the "Duce," but also against Ambrosio (towards whom the Navy harbored strong animosity for not having, in its opinion, sufficiently rebuffed the criticism leveled at it by Göring, for not having taken a more uncompromising stance on the issue of destroyers and, above all, because it maintained that in the event of an attack on the Italian coast, the fleet should give battle), whom it also considered too weak in its dealings with the Germans. This ^{was} an unfair accusation that did not take into account the difficulties Ambrosio had to overcome in order to change the nature of relations with the Germans from that which Cavallero had imposed on them, nor the limited room for maneuver within which he had to operate, trying to meet and balance four largely conflicting requirements: to defend the national territory without completely losing interest in Greece and without having adequate forces at his disposal; to avoid a break with the Germans, while at the same time trying to obtain as much help as possible from them and to contain their increasingly evident hegemonic tendencies; not to take any initiatives that could conflict with the sovereign's plans (which he was unaware of) or compromise him; not to jeopardize relations with Mussolini who, given the situation, was the only point of reference, willingly or unwillingly, since only he could still offer some guarantee to the Germans (and, therefore, try to obtain at least some of the aid that they would certainly not have granted to others) and attempt to convince Hitler to change his political strategy.

Despite the telegram Mussolini had sent to Hitler on April 30 urging him, as he had already done on ^{March} 9, to transfer to Italy an air force capable of counterbalancing the Anglo-American one, and to do so immediately if he wanted to save the Tunisian bridgehead, it had had no effect. Ambrosio, in full agreement with Bastianini, continued even after the Klessheim conference to point out to Kesselring and von Rintelen the Italian needs with an insistence, tenacity, and tone that ultimately achieved at least some results.

On March 9, writing to Hitler, Mussolini had once again flaunted his "unshakeable decision" to "march" with him "to the ^{end}." Less than twenty days later, after Admiral Dönitz's mission to Rome, during which he had attempted to have the Navy placed under the control of ^{German "experts,"} he wrote to him again, using noticeably different language: after presenting him with the "bold" proposal of a full-scale commitment in the western Mediterranean to prevent and block the Anglo-American invasion of the continent, he concluded his speech with these words:

This maneuver, which should naturally be carried out swiftly, would give the Axis back the initiative in that sea, which will be decisive for the outcome of the war, and allow Italy to march—as it unwaveringly desires—with Germany to the very end. Italy has resisted and continues to resist the pressure of two giants, plus the French, but I believe you are the first to realize that a defensive position, without any possible initiative, is doomed sooner or later to exhaustion.

A statement that could be interpreted in various ^{ways}, but it is difficult to imagine that Berlin did not grasp the difference compared to the previous one and did not become somewhat alarmed. After yet another request from Mussolini on April 30 for the immediate dispatch of aircraft, without which, he had telegraphed Hitler, the fate of Tunisia would be sealed, and after von Rintelen had informed Berlin that the Italian army would not be in a position to stem an attack on metropolitan territory: Kesselring—now resigned to the loss of Tunisia—was instructed to inform the Supreme Command that within a few weeks, with the troops returning from Africa and the reinforcements that had been assigned to it and would become available, three divisions would be formed to join the two already deployed in Sicily and Sardinia. This was on May 6. Three days later, the Germans offered two more divisions, the XVI Panzergrenadier, motorized, and the "Hermann Göring." Mussolini's response, telegraphed to Hitler on the evening of the 12th and the following day to Dönitz (who had come to Rome to assess and report to the Führer on the reactions to the surrender of Axis forces in Tunisia and the preparations to face the attacks that the enemy would now inevitably launch against Italy or against the

Southern France or against the Peloponnese, and above all how much could be relied on Italian loyalty and ^{Mussolini himself}) was essentially negative. Italy did not need men: "we have them"; Hitler had offered five divisions:

Ambrosio, who, according to the Führer, would have been happy to turn Italy into a British *dominion*, Roatta and the "shady characters" of the Navy) and Bastiani. Until then, this mosaic had been characterized in their eyes above all by the prevarications and more or less veiled refusals of the Italians to accept their point of view regarding the absolute necessity, in order to eliminate "banditry" in Yugoslavia, to put an end to any relationship or tolerance with General Mihajlovic's movement: the refusals and silences imposed by the Foreign Ministry and the military authorities on their requests to obtain the surrender of Jews who were or, worse, had taken refuge in the Italian-occupied zones: the insistence of Palazzo Chigi that the Axis take a solemn position in favor of the Arab national cause and, more recently, the "ambiguous relations" that Italian diplomacy and Bastianini himself maintained with the other minor partners of the Tripartite. If we add to this the fact that, at almost the same time that Mussolini was telling Dönitz in Rome that he considered only three divisions sufficient for Italy's needs, in Berlin Alfieri expressed, without resorting to the usual circumlocutions, to the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs von Steengracht, whom he had visited in the absence of von Ribbentrop to clarify some of the outstanding issues between the two governments, Italy's "resentment" at how the Germans had behaved in the Tunisian affair and in particular at the fact "that, despite precise assurances

given by the Germans regarding the sending of everything necessary to prolong the resistance as long as possible with the aim of making it definitive, in practice the German aid sent to Italy was almost non-existent and in any case not ^{timely}¹, it is easy to understand how the real and most important result of Mussolini's stance was to reinforce Hitler's conviction that "the most critical point" was now Italy and that, therefore, it was necessary, on the one hand, to accelerate preparations for the implementation of the "Alaric" and "Constantine" plans ("the Italians cannot be trusted," he said to Keitel on the 19th: "but on the other hand, I am convinced that, if something nasty happens in Italy, a small force will be enough to restore the situation...") and, on the other hand, to meet with the 'Duce' as soon as possible in order to personally assess his actual state of health, gauge his mood and intentions for the future and, if, as he thought, he appeared to him to be still loyal to the alliance, unlike his collaborators and the sovereign, to reinforce him in this position, convince him to accept the aid that they had subtly persuaded him to renounce in order to more easily carry out their criminal plots, and "find out how he thought Italy could fare in the event of a split between the Fascist revolution and the Royal House" and how he thought the Italian people would behave in this case.

Reduced to its bare bones, Hitler's position can be summarized as follows. The Although deeply irritated and alarmed by the attitude of Bastianini and the military (whom he blamed for the "mistakes" of the "Duce"), the Führer had not yet lost faith in Mussolini and was concerned that his disappearance from the political scene would leave fascism (whose crisis he underestimated, believing it to be limited mainly to certain environments, particularly those around the economic elite, Ciano, Grandi, Volpi, and their *entourages*, and a series of corrupt hierarchs). This was all the more so because Mussolini himself, speaking with him *tête-à-tête* in Klessheim, had told him that he had "no possible successor in the Fascist revolution": "as head of government, a successor could be found but there is no one to put at the head of the Fascist revolution"⁵ Despite his trust in the "Duce," Hitler also realized that, at that point, the pivot on which the situation revolved was, more than Mussolini, the sovereign. Where his contempt for Italians, for the heads

crowned heads and their entourages, and therefore also for Victor Emmanuel III (and for the Prince of Piedmont), led him into error (or, rather, made him jump the gun) was in believing that the sovereign had already decided on the "betrayal" and the removal of Mussolini, and that Ambrosio and the military were already working towards this end.

In reality, in mid-May, the king had not yet made any decision.

Undoubtedly, the end of resistance in Tunisia, the increasingly massive Allied bombings, and the growing threat of an enemy landing on national soil made him increasingly aware of the need for a decision that could only mean withdrawal from the war. This does not mean, however, that he had actually already made that decision, nor that he had lost all confidence in Mussolini, because on the contrary, among the reasons for understanding why he had not yet made it, his continuing faith in Mussolini's political ability and, therefore, his hope that the "Duce" would find a solution that would make withdrawal from the war less traumatic and less dangerous both from a political and social point of view and for the fate of the monarchy played a not insignificant role. But we will return to this in the following pages. What is important to emphasize is that, given the sovereign's wait-and-see position, Ambrosio

- contrary to what Hitler believed - at that time he was not only not "plotting" anything, but - even though he considered the Germans, as we have seen, "the enemy" from whom it was necessary to defend oneself - he had an attitude towards them that, from a strictly military point of view, can be defined as loyalist and, within the limits of the means at his disposal, he strove to prepare a defensive apparatus that was as capable as possible of coping with a possible Allied landing, which the information gathered by the SIM and diplomatic representatives in the Iberian Peninsula and Tangier on the deployment of Allied forces in the central-western Mediterranean increasingly suggested would be located in Sicily. And to make the defense more effective, he tried to involve the Germans as much as possible, continuing, despite the experience of the previous months, to request adequate air cover, compliance with the agreed quotas for supplies, and the provision of resources at least equal to those lost in Africa. That this action—his and Bastianini's—on Berlin was accompanied by an attempt to agree with the OKW on the repatriation of a certain number of divisions engaged in Yugoslavia and Greece and, possibly, even some of those that were in France, and to prevent Germany from sending its own troops to Italy instead of materials Germany would send its own troops to Italy is another matter, which, however, cannot be reduced, as some have done, to the *simple* denominator of 'treason', but must be seen in the light of three requirements which Ambrosio, while leaving all political decisions to the

Vrano, for his part, was trying to do everything possible to avert the risk of a military catastrophe, and he could not ignore these concerns, which were also shared in part by Mussolini.

The first of these requirements was essentially internal; partly related to image and prestige, but above all it responded to a specific reason for caution: to prevent a massive German military presence from further increasing hostility towards Germany and giving rise to incidents and disturbances of public order that would have opened up dangerous room for maneuver for anti-fascists and communists in particular and provoked even more dangerous reactions from the Germans. The second reason, which was very important to the Supreme Command, was to defend their decision-making and command autonomy from the Germans as much as possible: "They want to continue to collaborate with the German Command, but they want to be independent and have control in their hands, at least to the extent that it appears so from the outside..." von Rintelen tried in vain to explain to his superiors on May 26 in a long report on the Italian situation and the attitudes that manifested themselves, particularly those most evident in the Supreme Command. Finally, as for the third requirement, to bring into Italy only those German forces deemed indispensable to counter an enemy landing and to station them where this was expected to take place, i.e., on the islands and in the extreme south of the peninsula, was equivalent to guarding as much as possible against their "interference" on the domestic front and in key areas around Rome and central-northern Italy, and above all against their intervention in the event of a reversal of the political situation leading to the liquidation of Mussolini and Italy's exit from the war. This was a possibility that Ambrosio—we repeat—despite his deep commitment to organizing the defense and loyally collaborating with the OBS, could not completely rule out and which, after the end of operations in Africa, seemed increasingly inevitable to him and which he therefore had to keep in mind even though he was unaware of the sovereign's intentions.

However, sticking to this line of conduct was anything but easy. The Germans were becoming increasingly wary of the Italians and perhaps, accustomed to Ciano's cynical yielding, even more so than of the military, of Bastianini, whose increasingly harsh and uncompromising attitude sometimes made even some Italians think - a typical case being Michele Lanza, who was also serving at the embassy in Berlin and was therefore familiar with the situation.

- that he was "deliberately trying to poison relations between the two countries in order to provoke an incident that would justify a possible breakup."² And

Even when they were persuaded to grant aid, they could only do so to a very limited extent, as they had to give priority to the Eastern Front and were experiencing a shortage of aircraft due to the changes necessary to renew production lines in order to build new types of aircraft. As a result, Italy's most pressing requests (for aircraft and anti-aircraft and anti-tank artillery) were either rejected *outright* or met with little more than generic declarations of "goodwill" and *counter-offers* to send units that were increasingly difficult to refuse, partly due to the pressing need to strengthen the weak Italian defense system, which was falling further and further behind schedule, and partly to avoid further exacerbating relations between the two countries. Nevertheless, until the beginning of June, German counter-offers were partially contained.

On June 5, while reiterating once again to Kesselring (who was leaving for the Führer's headquarters) that Italy needed above all aircraft and anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, and that troop reinforcements would only be useful if they were armored divisions, Mussolini agreed to accept the offer of another panzergrenadier division, which Ambrosio planned to deploy in Lucania. However, he did not go any further, and it remains unclear whether, in accepting the offer of the panzergrenadier, the "Duce" hoped to receive in exchange at least some of the aircraft and artillery he had requested so many times and which Kesselring had assured him he would make a serious effort to grant. However, two unexpected events occurred on June 5 that made it difficult to persist in this attitude of restraint towards German offers: the Roma and the Vittorio Veneto were put out of service for several months following an enemy air raid on La Spezia (June 5), and Pantelleria surrendered after only four days of attack (June 8-11) immediately followed by the surrender of Lampedusa. Neither in regard to

Mussolini on the evening of the 10th), attributed the "collapse" of Pantelleria to "unexpected massive air and naval bombardments." That the island was the target of massive enemy bombardments is beyond question; however, the damage and casualties (60 dead and 150 wounded out of 11,657 garrison troops, 5 dead and 6 wounded among civilians) caused by them were much less than those reported by the *local* command in Rome and certainly not such as to make a longer and more honorable resistance impossible, so much so that the British sarcastically wrote that "what caused the surrender was not the bombing, but the sight of British bayonets approaching on landing craft under the protection of Royal Navy guns" (TRAFFAIL [H. T. DOR-LING], *Il Mediterraneo occidentale 1942-1945*, Rome 1953, p. 84). The main argument used to demand surrender, namely that the bombing had deprived the island of drinking water, also proved to be untrue. The truth is that the *local* command and even Supermarina (which, not surprisingly, when the Supreme Command had to prepare a "note" for Mussolini in which all radio communications between Pantelleria and the various commands in Sicily and Rome were to be included, said it was unable to provide in time a "complete collection" replacing the "most important messages" already transmitted) were now discouraged and resigned to defeat and, therefore unprepared for a "futile" struggle that would have involved sacrifices and casualties. They preferred to take the short route of surrender, even anticipating Mussolini's authorization and only partially destroying materials and, above all, underground defensive preparations, which thus fell largely intact into British hands.

The repercussions and echoes of the surrender of Pantelleria, both abroad and at home, were considerable and entirely negative. Abroad, it was seen as confirmation of the seriousness of the moral and material crisis in which Italy found itself and, especially on the part of the British, it was natural to compare the tenacity and spirit of sacrifice with which Malta had resisted the Axis air attacks for three years with the three and a half days that had been enough to make Pantelleria capitulate. The Germans, for their part, saw it, at best, as proof of the poor functioning of the Italian command, but, in general, they were led to attribute it *tout court* to treason. On the home front, the repercussions on Italian morale were very serious and extremely grave for the people of Sicily, who felt defenseless. This led to a further deterioration in 'public spirit', already very low due to the heavy bombing, the transport and supply crisis, which, as the head of the V Zona Ovra reported to Rome on June 29 (*ACS, Min. Interno, Dir. gen. P.S., Div. affari gen. e ris., Seconda guerra mondiale, b. 428, fase. 209*), generated "in the public the impression of a progressive, inexorable isolation of Sicily, which seems to prelude more serious events and the feared invasion of the island."

"the general, profound economic crisis" and the scarcity of rationed goods. Serious throughout the island, the situation was particularly dire in Messina and Palermo, the two cities that had been most heavily bombed. Among the various accounts available, the most accurate and dramatic is that of Edda Mussolini in a letter to her father the month before from Monreale, where the daughter of the "Duce" was serving in a Red Cross hospital:

"Dear Dad, I arrived in Palermo two days ago and the scene of desolation is quite striking. The city near the port is practically in ruins and even part of the main streets is semi-destroyed. Terror is painted on everyone's faces. At noon, the few people who come down from Monreale to the city rush back to the hills. From 2 p.m. onwards, the city is deserted except for the military and a few civilians. Let's talk a little about the civilians. Apart from the dead, there are the wounded and all those who have lost absolutely everything. They live along the sides of the road or in caves, under rocks, dying of hunger and cold. Literally, and you know I'm not exaggerating. The Fascio does what it can, but it should have the help of the military authorities, who at a certain point should not make any distinctions. Powers are divided and, as always, one shifts responsibility onto the other. Meanwhile, the food problem is becoming increasingly serious; after the last raid on May 9, the population went six days without bread, partly because the depots were hit, but mainly because none of the 300 bakeries in Palermo were working. No one thought to reopen them by authority. There has been no water for about a month, the telephones are not working, and electricity is available when it is available. To cut a long story short, these people have not had pasta since March or April. The allocation has never arrived on time. Why? Here, civilians feel abandoned and say so. For now, they are not rebelling, but the trustee Monroy tells me that if bread and pasta are not provided, anything can be expected. The civilian population has not seen meat for five months. Here, in addition to disorder and bombing, there has been real, chronic hunger for months. A kilo of bread costs 70 lire. I think it is time to remedy this situation, to consider Sicily, and especially the affected areas, as earthquake-stricken lands where nothing remains. There is a need for medicines, clothing, and means of transport to evacuate these poor people who are being slaughtered. That should be enough for you. In Monreale, there are about 20,000 displaced persons, some of whom could be sent inland. I asked the military command for trucks and they promised two trucks every other day. Good God, let them give us 50 all at once so that we can begin the evacuation and at the same time notify the municipalities that will have to receive them. As for the military, I was told by the Federal Secretary that they are showing even more fear than the civilians, fleeing like hares into the countryside. But that's nothing. Once the raid is over, instead of rushing to help, they stay put, unlike the Germans, who get busy. The population, which could not stand the Germans, now not only tolerates them but admires them for their organizational and even altruistic sense. To sum up, send food. Especially bread and pasta (they ask for nothing else), medicine, and clothing. I am in a civilian hospital, these people are naked in their beds and their surviving family members come to ask for the piece of bread that their relative saves from his meals. And above all

From Ambrosio's personal sense of responsibility and his position towards the Germans, one might underestimate the effect that Roatta's appointment as Chief of Staff of the Army had on him. Roatta began to argue (even with the Germans) that ten German divisions, six of which ^{were armored}, were needed for an effective defense of the national territory. Faced with these new developments on the Italian side, Italy found itself sooner than expected under the concrete threat of imminent enemy action against Sicily, which it had to face with a fleet lacking its largest and most modern ships, an air force that was quantitatively and qualitatively far inferior to that of its adversary, inadequate and largely incomplete defensive preparations, insufficient lines of communication that were virtually indefensible against enemy air attacks, and a combat force that was perhaps capable of containing the enemy's action but completely insufficient in terms of reserves and mobile rapid response units to drive it back to sea. In other words, a situation in which German support became indispensable. From Mussolini's point of view, because the success of the landing would

Don't give them the impression that they have been abandoned. I have been to Albania and Russia, and I have never seen so much suffering and pain. And I myself feel as if I have ended up I don't know where, a thousand miles away from my homeland and civilization. For now, they still say that the Duce doesn't know, but now you know. In any case, whatever means you use to send stuff. It may not be possible for everyone, but at least they should feel that we are trying to help them. They are good people, so patient, so ready to acknowledge. If you want further clarification, have the Fiduciaria del Fascio di Palermo, Countess Monroy, come to Rome, receive her without intermediaries and have her tell you, without fear, what she told me. You will understand. I repeat, bread, pasta, medicines, clothing, especially for civilians; the military are fine. Let me know if you have received this and please take action. I understand the difficulties, etc., but here the problem is very serious and could become catastrophic at any moment, even politically. I embrace you - Edda" (*ACS, Private Secretariat of the Duce, Correspondence ref. (1922-1943)*, phase F.P.R., "Ciano Galeazzo and Countess," sub-file io).

In Rome, as General Puntoni immediately noted in his diary (P. PUNTONI, *Parla Vittorio Emanuele III* cit., p. 135), the announcement of the surrender "shocked everyone, but above all it shocked the High Command because it was hoped that our garrison would resist the enemy's attempts to land until the very end." L. Pietromarchi's judgment was more drastic. On June 22, when the story of the surrender was no longer as vague as it had been in the early days, he noted: "Pantelleria was the most serious case of cowardice in this war. The island was impregnable. The rocks drop sheer and battalions of Alpine troops are needed to climb them. The shelters are in caves under tens of meters of rock. The only points where landing was possible are two small, easily defensible ports. At the time of surrender, the garrison still had 9,000 rounds of large howitzer ammunition; it had six months' worth of food supplies; the cisterns were full. It is not true that there was a shortage of water. The garrison commander telegraphed the Duce that the bombing was causing casualties among the civilian population. The Duce ordered the surrender to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. It later emerged that in a month of bombing, there were 58 deaths, while in Naples, Palermo, and elsewhere, the death toll ran into the hundreds and thousands. On the last day of uninterrupted bombing, there was only one, I repeat, only one death. Admiral Pavesi, the heroic defender of Pantelleria, should be called 'pavido' (fearful) rather than Pavesi.

Mussolini, who had relied heavily on the island's defensive capabilities, the Italian "Tanti-Malta" in the Sicilian Channel, and who had authorized the surrender on the basis of information from Supermarina transmitted to him by Ambrosio and the latter's suggestions, was deeply disturbed by this and, having learned how events had actually unfolded, would never admit to having given the order to surrender; not even in *Storia di un anno* (MUSSOLINI, XXXIV, pp. 310 and 320 ff.), when he described Admiral Pavesi, commander of the Pantelleria garrison, as "the first in order of time among the traitorous admirals."

¹ See E. RINTELEN, *Mussolini l'Alleato*, op. cit., pp. 189 ff.; F. W. DEAKIN, *Storia della repubblica di Salò*, op. cit.,

irretrievably frustrated his hopes of convincing Hitler to radically revise his war strategy and at the same time sealed the end of the regime or, if the Germans had prevented it, its downgrading to the level of any Quisling government. In Ambrosio's case, because whatever Vittorio Emanuele III's actual intentions were, he continued to ignore them, and even though there was a growing movement around the sovereign and on the part of Acquarone that suggested a turning point was approaching, there were signs that it was unlikely to happen before the outcome of the Allied landing was known, so that Ambrosio was left with the task that was not only more difficult but also intrinsically more contradictory: to provide the best possible defense, which necessarily meant relying on the Germans and therefore not exacerbating relations with them by quibbling too much over the type of aid they were willing to give, even though he was well aware of the danger that such aid posed to the future of the country, the monarchy, and his freedom of maneuver. This explains why, all things considered, until the Allies landed in Sicily, it was Mussolini and not Ambrosio who was less yielding towards the Germans, even though the latter must have been aware that they had no intention of changing their policy towards Italy.

What happened in June is, in this regard, not only very significant—

It is not conclusive, but it helps to understand why, as Vittorio Emanuele III continued not to reveal his intentions (and, probably, not out of excessive caution, which would have been absurd with a loyal supporter like Ambrosio, but because he himself still had doubts about what to do), it was precisely after the surrender of Pantelleria that, between the end of June and the beginning of July (when he asked Castellano to study a new plan for Mussolini's arrest), Ambrosio, faced with the worsening military situation and the growing fear that the Germans would send in new troops that would make an Italian disengagement impossible, felt the need and duty to openly propose to the sovereign the "opportunity for a military dictatorship headed by Caviglia or Badoglio" that could open negotiations with the Allies and, therefore, to speed up action aimed at removing Mussolini from power and to commit himself personally to both operations

On June 8, having just returned from one of his lightning trips to the Führer's headquarters, Kesselring went to Ambrosio to inform him of Hitler's decisions. The minutes of ^{the meeting} reveal what in

In the weeks that followed, it became increasingly clear that this would be the OKW's course of action: to commit as few aircraft as possible to Italy and the Mediterranean in general, and instead to send in a number of divisions (mostly motorized, although it was said that it was also willing to send in armored divisions) sufficient to enable it to take control of the country.

- by mid-July there would have been nine - but certainly not enough to make a decisive contribution to his defense, because, as we will see more clearly in the next volume, both in the case of Italy's "defection" and in that of an Allied success in Sicily and their passage in force across the Strait of Messina, the OKW planned to quickly disengage its troops in the south and station them further north, according to some in the Apennines, according to others even further north on the Genoa-Rimini line.

During my recent visit to the Führer, the field marshal began, I reported on the general situation of the German troops stationed in Italy.

The Führer expressed his intention to increase German air forces in Italy in order to improve combat capabilities and increase the chances of repelling any enemy action... The Führer also considered further improvements in the efficiency of (German) ground troops, especially those stationed or assigned to the islands, reinforcing them with tanks, reconnaissance units, and self-propelled guns.

In all cases, he ordered that the H. Goring Division, destined for Sicily, be urged to prepare for action.

"H. Goring" Division, destined for Sicily, be expedited...

The possibility of reinforcing the German troops stationed in Sardinia was also examined. The paperwork concerning these matters is already being examined by the Supreme Command.

In principle, the Führer is of the opinion that everything must be done to hold the islands...

When Ambrosio tried to find out whether a decision had finally been made regarding the dispatch of air units and their size, the response he received was entirely generic ("increase in bomber aircraft; further development of fighter-bombers; 'internal' reinforcement of fighter units; probable arrival of an additional fighter group") and accompanied by technical considerations that betrayed the intention to delay any dispatch. In the days immediately following the surrender of Pantelleria (which made a deep impression in Germany and increased fears of an Italian defection)¹ the OKW informed Ambrosio in June that it was willing to provide additional troops if Mussolini and the Supreme Command requested them; the following day, von Ribbentrop informed Alfieri that Hitler had decided to send Marshal von Richthofen to Italy "with a

¹ See L. SIMONI [M. LANZA], *Berlino ambasciata d'Italia* cit., p. 352.

strong air force"; and finally, on June 18, Kesselring proposed to Ambrosio that he request two more divisions and also pointed out the advisability of keeping in mind not only the south but also the center-north and providing for its defense in case the islands could not be held, mentioning the possibility of obtaining additional ^{troops} for this purpose.

Thanks to documentation that became available after the end of the war, it is now easy to say that the German side hoped that these offers would above all reassure and restrain the Italian side, so as to gain time to bring in the forces necessary to deal with Italy's defection, which almost all the major German political and military leaders, starting with Hitler, were now expecting. However, precisely because they were convinced that Italy would defect sooner or later, they were also determined to implement measures that would correspond to the realization of their plans. Significant in this regard is their offer to send the armored divisions that were so dear to Mussolini, but then to fall back during negotiations with the Supreme Command on simple motorized divisions (sufficient for the purposes they had in mind) or, even not to send them at all, as would have happened when, on July 6, Roatta formally requested the dispatch of two armored divisions, the Wehrmacht General Staff did not comply with the request despite (or because) the Anglo-Americans had landed in Sicily in the meantime. That said, it must also be said that - although obviously unaware of what we know today - both Mussolini and Ambrosio were now convinced of the insincerity not only of the more or less general German assurances that they would give Italy all possible help, but also of a large part of the Germans' offers and commitments and, more generally, even of the German attitude towards Italy itself. This helps to better understand various aspects of those last months of the regime, in particular the different attitudes of Mussolini and Ambrosio towards the Germans with regard to military relations. If we consider, on the one hand, Mussolini's state of mind towards Germany and Hitler and, on the other, the personal and political conditions in which Ambrosio had to operate, it is not surprising that between the two, unable to risk precipitating relations with the Germans, he ended up having to be the more cautious towards them.

When von Richthofen arrived in Rome on June 13, contrary to what von Ribbentrop had announced to Alfieri, it was not to organize the

transfer of "a strong air unit" to Italy, but for "an inspection tour," and informed the Supreme Command that the OKW had no intention of sending either large or ^{small} air units. Mussolini (who had been thrown into a state of prostration and excitement by the surrender of Pantelleria and its repercussions at all levels and in all circles) flew into a rage and summoned Ambrosio, Sorice, Favagrossa, and the three chiefs of staff to Villa Torlonia the following day and gave them instructions to once again "finalize the requests for resources from the armed forces to the German side." This step, at that point, was almost purely polemical, since, after months of general and specific requests that had been rejected, left unanswered, and unfulfilled, formulating yet another general request (which, among other things, asked for the delivery of two thousand aircraft) ended up taking on the significance of a political act; a desire to formalize German responsibilities and bad faith, which the acceptance of two of the divisions offered by the OKW certainly did not make less evident, since the "Duce" had given his consent to their acceptance only because it had been *wrested* from him "after prolonged resistance." - as Ambrosio would say to von Rintelen and Kesselring when he handed them the memorandum in which all the requests were listed - by the Supreme Command and, in any case, he had made it conditional on the commitment that they were indeed "armored units," otherwise Ambrosio would have had to refuse them and instead propose to the OKW "the return of two of our divisions from France and their replacement by German ones"² And this is indeed how Keitel understood it when, on June 23, von Rintelen brought him Ambrosio's memorandum.

On June 23, von Rintelen³wrote in his memoirs, I delivered the list of the Co-Commander's wishes to the Führer's headquarters in Berchtesgaden.

Italian Supreme Command and had a three-hour conversation with Marshal Keitel about the Italian situation. Keitel saw in the list I submitted to him only the preparation for Italy's abandonment of the alliance, an "alibi" as he put it.

As expected, the German response was extremely vague. Rin-telen was ordered to inform Rome that the list would be "examined." Only the request for aircraft was immediately discussed between Fougier and von Richthofen, with entirely disappointing results: after more than ten days of intense negotiations, Fougier was unable to extract from von Richthofen more than what he had conceded as a consolation prize at the outset, namely the dispatch of only six aircraft groups; a total of less than 100 aircraft, for which the Italian side would have had to make twelve airports available to the Luftwaffe and which would not have entered service for at least a month and a half.

As we have already seen, all the groups that in various ways would have been

Since 1941, he had been trying to create a heterogeneous "anti-fascist" current" capable of guiding its actions and turning it into a tool to "force the king's hand." He was in contact with almost all the groups, and his accounts, like very few others, reveal the unrealistic nature of most of them, their ^{futile} actions, most of the time getting in each other's way, attributing to themselves merits that often did not exist (a typical case is the appointment of Ambrosio as chief of staff, for which it is practically impossible to list how many attributed to themselves the merit of having paved the way, when it was only the result of Mussolini's free choice), taking conflicting, untimely, and unrealistic initiatives that often ended up having the opposite effect to that desired: irritating Vittorio Emanuele III and making him more uncertain, cynical, and secretive; making those few who had a real grasp of the situation and a realistic view of the difficulties more cautious in order to get out of it with as little damage as possible; increasing the Allies' suspicions about the initiatives and soundings that were attempted with them; not to mention the reactions that, when they leaked out, they provoked in the fascist camp, both among the intransigent and among those who - *^opposition o r* government matters little - tended towards the same objectives, but with a different sense of reality, and those of Mussolini who, despite the sympathies and cover that various of these groups and especially some of their exponents now enjoyed in the state apparatus, was much better informed than is commonly believed about their activities.

Between mid- and late 1942, all political forces and anti-fascist groups were convinced that it was now possible and urgent to remove Mussolini from power and necessary to take Italy out of the war. But, as we have already said, the agreement ended there: on the means, alliances, subsequent objectives and, above all, on the attitude to be taken towards moderate fascists and, even more importantly, towards Vittorio

Emanuele III and the monarchy itself, positions differed and divisions existed not only between the various anti-fascist forces, but also within some of them.

In 1940, when the problem was to prevent Italy from joining the conflict alongside Germany, and again later, during the campaign in Greece, an intervention by the sovereign would have been welcomed by everyone with jubilation, except, perhaps, by the communists. In 1940-41, and even as late as mid-1942, the prospect of a break with the alliance with Germany would have made it possible to accept without too much difficulty a government that included some moderate fascists. And in fact, in the early months of 1942, men such as Marcello Soleri, Aldo Rossini, Fulvio Milani, Emilio Gonzales, and Marshal Caviglia looked to fascists such as Grandi and De Stefani. Only towards the end of 1942 did this hypothesis of collaboration fall through, as former Liberal secretary Alberto Giovannini informed one of Grandi's closest associates, Mario Zamboni- mainly due to opposition from the Action Party and the Communists, but not only from them. It was also rejected by numerous liberal-democratic figures, partly to avoid divisions within the anti-fascist front (in Italy and abroad), partly for fear that it would arouse mistrust and hostility on the part of the Allies, and partly because the deterioration of the military situation led them to believe that such a compromise was no longer necessary. Even among Catholics (and in the Vatican, a typical and at the same time extreme case was that of Monsignor Montini) there were those who opposed it.

The point of greatest contrast and division, however, was their attitude toward Victor Emmanuel III and the monarchy. For the liberal democrats, many of whom were also loyal monarchists (although they did not spare the sovereign criticism for his concessions and passivity in the face of fascism, to the point that there were those who hoped for Vittorio Emanuele III's abdication in favor of his son and even his grandson), the monarchy was a clear point of reference, practically the only one around which both anti-fascists and the military, as well as the vast majority of the country, could rally, and which could take the initiative to remove Mussolini and fascism. The left was hostile to the monarchy (although in May 1943 the communists would realistically declare themselves willing to set aside their anti-monarchist prejudices in order to make possible an agreement and unified action to induce the king to act and create "a democratic government that would have the task

to break the alliance with Germany and sign an armistice¹⁾) and, above all, the Action Party, partly because of its intransigence and moralism, and partly because some of its most active members, who were attentive not only to the present but also to the future, being convinced that the post-war period would see the emergence of an extremist psychosis even greater than that which had characterized the previous one, believed that putting the institutional problem on the agenda and dramatizing it would divert this psychosis from the social sphere, to which it would otherwise have turned, towards the much less dangerous terrain of the struggle for the republic.

Linked to attitudes toward the sovereign and the monarchy was inevitably (even without taking into account personal ambitions, which did exist) the question of what character the government that would replace the fascist one should have and who should be its leader. And, even in this regard, opinions differed, although the divisions were less clear-cut, between those who wanted a political government (i.e., composed of anti-fascists) from the outset and those who, on the other hand, realized that this was impossible and were willing to accept that, initially, for a short period, a mixed government would be formed, composed of military personnel and representatives of the anti-fascist forces willing to collaborate with the monarchy, and that it would be headed by a military officer. The key issue, however, was who this military officer should be.

The only prestigious military leader who had not compromised himself with fascism was Marshal Cavaglia, who, moreover, had good personal relations with British circles, was well integrated into the circle of senators and old anti-fascist leaders, and enjoyed the esteem of the king. However, more than one person harbored mistrust toward him (formally expressed as concern that his advanced age made him unsuitable for such a demanding task) and, in some cases, suspicion about his relations with Freemasons (suspicions which, if real, should also have played against Badoglio), both because of his harsh and authoritarian character and, above all, because of his strong monarchist beliefs and his personal relationship with the sovereign.

Apart from Cavaglia, the only other prestigious military leader was Marshal Badoglio, who, after his dismissal as Chief of Staff, flaunted his staunch anti-fascism in the appropriate circles, but who certainly could not boast a clean past, either from a military point of view (due to his responsibility for the defeat at Caporetto) or from a political point of view (due to his relations with fascism and his acquiescence in the face of

to Mussolini on many occasions) and who was known for his ambitious, vindictive, self-interested, and ambiguous character. Paradoxically, it was precisely those character traits, together with his unscrupulous ability to establish contacts with all circles that might appear useful to him, but at the same time to present his 'opposition' to fascism as purely patriotic and apolitical, with his relationship with the Minister of the Royal Household, Acquarone (who had been his aide-de-camp in the past) and , perhaps his membership of the Freemasons, tipped the balance in Badoglio's favor, in the hope or belief that, compared to Caviglia (and Ambrosio, who, after his appointment as Chief of Staff, could also have become a candidate, albeit one of lesser prestige and notoriety at home and abroad), he would be less

"dominated" by the sovereign and more willing to support the political aims of the anti-fascist parties.

In this context, Myron Taylor's mission to the Vatican had raised a series of hopes and expectations which, in turn, had set in motion or accelerated a whole series of initiatives and attempts to establish contacts both between the various anti-fascist groups and between them and those closest to the sovereign, and abroad, with the Anglo-Americans.

The first attempts in this second direction had been made by the group around Princess Maria José. On September 3, upon learning of M. Taylor's imminent arrival, the princess had asked Monsignor Montini whether Roosevelt's envoy would bring peace proposals and had asked him to let Taylor know that the Italian people wanted peace, "but did not want it to be negotiated with those currently in power who were trying to save themselves by abandoning the head of government and feigning sympathy for the British and Americans": "there are other men who could take over and who would willingly negotiate peace: an invitation should come from the Allies to facilitate a decision within the country." A month later, having learned via the Vatican that the British ambassador in Madrid, Samuel Hoare, had told the apostolic nuncio that if IT-

If Italy had emerged from the conflict, it would have been given special treatment. The princess communicated the news to Acquaforte, who reacted very negatively, replying that the Holy See could not act as an intermediary in such a matter. Despite this blunt *refusal*, so typical of the sovereign's mentality and his atavistic distrust of the Vatican, which ruled out the possibility that it was a personal initiative of the Minister of the Royal Household, the princess decided to act on her own initiative and, through the Portuguese ambassador to the Holy See, tried to test the waters to see if Salazar would be willing to act as an intermediary to find out the conditions that the Allies were imposing on Italy's exit from the conflict. As M. Toscano has accurately reconstructed, however, the operation took so long (and communications were so unreliable that the SIM became aware of it, albeit without consequences, since Ambrosio kept the news to himself, limiting himself to mentioning it to the interested party) that it was not until June 1943 that Salazar's positive response arrived, and it was not until July 19 that the person chosen by the princess to make contact with the British, Alvisio Emo di Capodilista, was able to leave for Lisbon, where he received the news of July 25 even before he had been able to establish contact.

According to the testimony of Marquise ^{Benzoni}, in a first moment the princess tried to convince Raffaele Mattioli to take on the task of traveling to Portugal, and Emo di Capodilista was chosen only after the CEO of Banca Commerciale Italiana refused for fear that Maria José's initiative might benefit the monarchy. This detail is indicative of the amateurism and political naivety of the Princess of Piedmont's initiative, but also of the *animus* that gave rise to more or less all attempts to make contact with the Allies (or to urge the Holy See to act as an intermediary with them: think of the one already mentioned, made in February 1943 by Marshal Bastico). This *spirit* unfortunately also prevailed in the contacts made after July 25, which explains why all these attempts, although originating in essentially limited circles and in groups that were more or less connected to each other, took place without the knowledge of the others and with different and sometimes competing perspectives. This, in turn, helps to explain why they aroused perplexity, irritation, and suspicion among the Allies, who feared that they were concealing some maneuver in the spirit of the most typical "Italian Machiavellianism." And this was all the more so

more than between the British and Americans, and within the British cabinet itself (which since December 1940 had been considering what stance to take in the event of an ^{Italian} collapse), there was a lack of real

¹ The final text of the document ("Policy in the event of an Italian collapse") was drafted on December 6, 1940, at the height of the crisis surrounding Italian operations in Greece, by the Joint Planning Staff and approved, after extensive discussion, on December 1 by the Chief of Staff, who nine days later also approved a document on the type of propaganda to be used to bring about Italian collapse. The document is reproduced in its entirety on pages 4 ff. of a very extensive (164 pages, plus attachments) and very important internal memorandum of the Foreign Office, "The Italian Armistice," which deals with the entire Italian armistice affair from August 1940 to September 1943 from the British perspective and is now preserved in the PRO in London, Cab. 101/144. Given its length, we reproduce only the first twelve points:

"We submit a brief report on the military situation that may develop if the Italians show signs of collapse, and on the steps that can be taken in the face of this eventuality. Possible developments in the situation.

2) The deterioration in Italian morale would probably take one of the following forms:

a) acceptance of German control to avoid collapse.

Faced with the prospect of the collapse of Italian resistance and the consequent collapse of his regime, Mussolini would probably feel compelled to accept greater German control and assistance, but this would likely meet with strong resistance from the Army and Navy.

b) Complete collapse.

This could easily happen in the face of further setbacks and could evolve too quickly for Mussolini to cope with.

c) Negotiation of an armistice by other elements in Italy, over Mussolini's head, possibly accompanied by an appeal to us for help in keeping the Germans out of Italy.

There have been some indications that the situation may possibly develop along these lines, although this will depend on whether the anti-Axis elements are strong enough to overthrow Mussolini. The influence of the Army leaders would probably be decisive. However, it is unlikely that effective resistance against the Germans could be organized in time. Nevertheless, this course of action on the part of the Italians would be more advantageous to us than any other.

Even if Italy's defection from the Axis were limited to only a few elements, and if it proved impossible to keep the Germans away from Italy in general, it would still be possible to keep them away from certain areas (e.g., Sardinia).

d) Separate peace negotiations by Mussolini.

We believe this is out of the question, since even if we were prepared to deal with Mussolini, the current regime in Italy must either survive or fall because of its Axis policy.

3) We cannot say how the situation is most likely to develop. From the point of view of our policy, acceptance of German control by the Italian government in order to avoid collapse would be the worst possible outcome, which we must avoid if we can, while an Italian defection from the Axis over Mussolini's head would be the best thing and we should therefore work towards this.

4) In the following paragraphs, we consider the likely German conduct in each scenario.

Acceptance of German control to avoid collapse.

5) If allowed to help Italy prevent a collapse, Germany would most likely do so for the following reasons:

a) To boost Italian morale and keep it in the war, and to save the prestige of the Axis and the dictatorial regimes.

b) To reinforce Italian forces in Libya.

c) To install German air forces in southern Italy to gain control of the central Mediterranean.

d) To restore the situation in Greece and prevent it from being used as a forward base.

e) Strengthen the Italian Navy and Air Force.

If possible, in certain circumstances, take action against Tunisia with a view to further operations in North Africa.

g) Prevent the establishment of British bases on Italian territory.

6) If the Germans were to transfer strong forces to Italy before the Italian collapse and in doing so were able to maintain effective Italian hostility towards the Allies, the current strategic situation in the Me-

internally, not to make any real commitments in the first case, and in the second, to reject the *advances* made to them, in short, to remain silent and not to take any decisions that might in any way tie their hands, create conflicts between them and with the Soviets, and provoke reactions among their own public opinion. Not to mention, finally, the influence that the diversity of opinion and the latent conflict between those who believed that the Germans would make it impossible to overthrow the regime, so that an armistice or a separate peace would be practically ineffective, those (and this was the case with Churchill, who was opposed, however, by Eden with the argument that the bulk of the Fascist party and the Germans would never allow it) who thought that continued pressure on Italy in the form of massive aerial bombardments would force the Italian people to choose between a 'Grandi-type' government and German occupation; a solution that would not have suited the Allies, so that they would have had to be prepared to negotiate even with fascists such as Grandi, while avoiding any advance commitments to provide aid ("our primary objective," according to a *paper* drafted by Churchill on November 25, 1942 \ "is to destroy German Nazism, and if a separate peace with Italy can help achieve this, negotiations can be justified on this basis"). Finally, there were those who, considering Italy a secondary front compared to the real *second front*, which alone could give the Soviets tangible proof of Anglo-American good faith towards them, did not view the possibility of an internal Italian crisis and the consequent need for the Germans to leave other areas unguarded in order to occupy Italy and replace the Italian occupation troops in France and especially in the Balkans as entirely negative.

As can be seen, all attempts to approach the Allies were doomed to failure, and the same was true of the Princess of Piedmont: to think that such a prominent figure as Mattioli could travel to Portugal without arousing suspicion, creating difficulties for Salazar and causing the whole operation to fail is in itself proof of the absolute lack of political sense, not to mention the wishful thinking of the Princess of Piedmont and her group; further proof is provided by the fact that they entrusted her to a man who, ideologically and politically,

Italian anti-fascists in America (1942-1944). The 'Legion' in Pacciardi's correspondence with Borgese, Salvemini, Sforza, and Sturzo, op. cit.

¹ See the aforementioned Foreign Office memorandum "The Italian Armistice," which clearly outlines the various positions.

She moved in completely different circles, those of the Action Party, and was deeply hostile to the monarchy, so much so — but the princess did not know this — he was involved in another attempt whose political perspective was, beyond appearances, in contrast — not to say alternative — to that which characterized Maria José's attempt.

Influenced as he was by his anti-monarchist prejudice and naive optimism about the attitude of the Allies, and in particular the Americans, towards a "democratic and anti-fascist Italy," the Action Party group, almost at the same time as the princess had made contact with Monsignor Montini, had in fact hastened to launch a complex two-stage operation, of which it managed to carry out only the first stage, with results that, in the light of subsequent events, would prove to be of no real value. As Ugo La Malfa revealed: preparations were made "a document for Sforza, in which we warned the Americans about the monarchy's game, which would attempt to save itself by using so-called moderate fascism and part of anti-fascism." The document was taken to Lisbon by Enrico Cuccia, who worked for Mattioli at the Banca Commerciale Italiana (one of the centers of left-wing anti-fascist activity) and given to George Kennan and Sforza, who obtained its publication in the New York Times. In real political terms, its only result was to induce Undersecretary Adolph Berle to make an extremely quick and ambiguous statement on November 14, at a *meeting* organized by the Mazzini Society and the Italian-American Labor Council, to the effect that the United States would safeguard "Italian nationhood." Nor did it have any effect on Roosevelt and his decision to include Italy among the countries on which unconditional surrender would be imposed at the Casablanca Conference the following January, and to make that decision official, which Churchill, who did not agree with it and hoped, as we have already said, to be able to renegotiate it, had not included in the final communiqué. As for the second phase of the operation, which involved the transfer abroad of Bonomi and General Roberto Bencivenga with the dual purpose of establishing a government of "free Italy" in exile, to counteract the one that would sooner or later arise from the royal initiative, and of removing Bonomi "from the machinations of the monarchist milieu," it did not materialize either, as the former Prime Minister rejected the offer.

Around the same time, two other initiatives were launched. One in Geneva, Switzerland, on behalf of Duke Aimone d'Aosta (the former Duke of Spoleto and designated King of Croatia), who had informed the British that he was ready to lead a military action to overthrow fascism (and to try to involve Prince Umberto as well) and to establish a Gaullist-type government in Sardinia, on condition that the Allies undertook to support it with air support and a troop landing, not to demand the surrender of the fleet, and to maintain the monarchy. The reception that this *advance* had received in London was better than that reserved for the soundings that, in the same days, as we have already said, had been made, with Ciano's authorization, by the minister in Lisbon, F. Franson¹: while these had been dropped, it was kept, so to speak, 'on the back burner'; no follow-up was given, but the Geneva channel through which it had been made was, in any case, kept open.

Much more difficult to categorize is the second initiative, which is not as clear. It is unclear whether and to what extent this should be attributed to the anti-fascist opposition, and in particular to groups close to the Action Party that had connections with Badoglio and Caviglia and were therefore able to obtain from each of the two marshals a sort of guarantee to be used with the Allies, or whether it should rather be attributed *entirely to Badoglio, who would have used these reports to gauge the Allies' attitude towards him³ with a view to resuming the contacts he had already had with them several months earlier.* to Badoglio, who would have used these relationships to gauge the Allies' attitude ^{towards him³} with a view to resuming the contacts he had already had several months earlier with the British SOE and to put forward his candidacy to lead a future government to both sides. The fact that the marshal did not

What he says in his memoir dedicated to the years of World War II is not a problem in this second case, given that, apart from their constant inaccuracy and unreliability, his memoirs tend to leave his contacts with the Allies before July 25 vague and, in any case, place them in late 1943, whereas in reality an SOE agent in Bern had been in contact with him through an intermediary (probably Dr. Luigi Rusca of Mondadori) since May 1942. What is certain, however, is that the initiative was presented to the British as inspired by Badoglio (in agreement, even, with Caviglia, which is unthinkable, because the old marshal considered Badoglio "a straw dog who goes where the biggest morsel is" ^{a n d} would have done anything except collaborate with a man he totally disliked ^{a n d} considered responsible for his behavior with fascism), but 1) that those who were involved in some way were almost all strangers to Badoglio's circle ^{a n d} connected with the real anti-fascist opposition, some even with the Action Party; 2) that the initiative recalls, at least in part, the Action Party's plan to expatriate General Bencivenga, together with Bonomi, to make him the military leader of anti-fascism abroad. From what Eden wrote on February 1, 1943, to the American chargé d'affaires in London, from the testimonies given in the 1960s by Bianca Ceva and Mario Zino, ^{a n d} above all from the documents of the SOE ^{a n d} the British War Cabinet, we know that the initiative proposed to the British in Switzerland as early as August and more concretely in the first half of November 1942 involved sending an emissary of Badoglio (whom the SOE presented as "firmly convinced that the Axis cannot win the war," no longer loyal to the House of Savoy and "eager, at the right moment, to take command and establish a military government") General Gustavo Pesenti, with the task of "discussing with the British government coordinated action from outside ^{a n d} inside Italy aimed at overthrowing the fascist regime" and establishing "an Italian anti-fascist army," reclu-

established with British help among Italians living abroad and prisoners of war in British hands.

Albeit with some uncertainty and after a thorough examination that had personally involved Eden (who also considered Badoglio one of the generals who, "at the right moment," when discontent in the army had "reached the stage that could make it a political possibility," could overthrow Mussolini) and Churchill and ultimately the War Cabinet, this *advance* was also practically abandoned.

In a memorandum dated January 14, 1943, for the War Cabinet, Eden summarized the disadvantages that would result from any preliminary negotiations with Badoglio: "If Pesenti succeeds in recruiting him, we will have to support Badoglio even in the face of a different anti-fascist movement, making political concessions for a military force of dubious value and even a harbinger of unwelcome political activity.". Three days later, writing to Churchill, he added that Badoglio, like any other "serious party in Italy," should be offered "only the choice [for Italy] of survival or drowning, without any promises... The Italians must come out of the war with terror." Given American pressure for a more understanding attitude and given that "if we want to go further and obtain the collaboration of some groups within Italy, we must arouse some hope for the future of the country, but we can guarantee nothing about overseas possessions or the territorial integrity of Italy," the only thing to do was to soften the tone normally used by propaganda with any emissaries and tell them that Italians would also benefit from the "Atlantic Charter," "that is, freedom of choice of their political regime and free access to the world market." That was as far as he could go. The War Cabinet, on the basis of Eden's memorandum and concerns about negative reactions in the Balkans to any form of preliminary agreement with the Italians, had finally decided not to drop the contact altogether, both to prevent Badoglio from turning to the Americans and in view of possible negotiations with a future Italian government born of a

"anti-fascist revolt" in which Badoglio would probably have taken part, but not to make any prior commitments. On this basis, in the second half of March, the Foreign Office informed the SOE to let General Pesenti know that, if he wished, he would be taken to Cyrenaica "provided he was ready to leave without conditions," since on the part of

Britain did not intend to make any prior commitments, nor would the military authorities in Africa have made any without explicit authorization from ^{London}.

Faced with this response, which left the door open to the project of forming "an ^{Italian} anti-fascist army," but gave Badoglio no reason to believe that London saw him as Mussolini's natural successor, the marshal's intermediaries withdrew in good order.

At the same time that the possibility of negotiations with Badoglio was being examined, Eden sent Cordell Hull a comprehensive analysis of the Italian question as it was seen in London, which suggests that the British considered the various advances made to them continuously by individual figures and small Italian groups as proof that the Italian situation was not yet ripe and that it was preferable to wait for more decisive personalities to make a move, the king in the first place (regarding the "will and ability" of any other member of the royal family to lead a revolt against fascism, Eden, despite the approaches of the Duke of Aosta, was said to be "extremely doubtful") or, possibly, moderate fascists (significant, despite his personal hatred for Grandi, is Eden's reference to 'the possibility that moderate members of the Fascist Party may take a stand against Mussolini') and, above all, "not counting on the possibility of a separate peace" and instead focusing everything on indiscriminate aerial bombardment and military action in general (and on "a firm line in our propaganda") in order to cause "unrest" that would provoke either a German occupation or an initiative on the part of Victor Emmanuel III.

That the real crux, the keystone of the whole situation, was the over-

No, whose attitude would also substantially influence that of the military who had effective control of ^{the armed forces}, as all the most serious and responsible opponents of fascism in Italy, and with them the most responsible part of moderate fascism, were well aware. The real problem, however, was how to influence Victor Emmanuel III, how to convince him to act, overcoming, on the one hand, his uncertainties and fears, on the other, his formalistic constitutional scruples and, above all, on yet another hand, that mixture of realism and skepticism typical of his personality, but which now (we will return to this later) seemed to paralyze him, and in part did paralyze him, causing him to adopt a secretive attitude towards the few who managed to reach him and tried to convince him to act. This explains why, from the end of 1942 onwards, the constitutional opposition's main efforts were directed towards this goal, exploiting all possible channels, both direct ones, such as the few personalities who had access to the sovereign, and indirect ones, such as those who could act as intermediaries, if not directly with him, at least with those closest to him, the Minister of the Royal Household, Acquarone, and the first aide-de-camp, General Puntoni. And not only the constitutional opposition. Marcello Soleri's memoirs testify that between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, even among the opponents of the monarchy, the conviction gained ground that only an intervention by the sovereign could break the deadlock: "uncompromising opponents of the monarchy... repeatedly came to me to insistently point out that I would have failed in my political and historical duty by not speaking to the king, while I could, to make him aware of the need for his immediate intervention to resolve the political situation, which was so tense and could not be prolonged."

In this effort, which involved everyone who could be involved, even the old Grand Admiral Thaon di Revel, who, persuaded by Tommaso Gallarati Scotti to broach the subject with the king, whom he saw almost every week in his capacity as secretary of the Grand Magisterium of St. Maurice, went to church the morning before daring to speak to him to ask ^{the Lord} for help, Princess Maria José played an important role. It was she, among others, who on May 14 brought the request for an audience for Bonomi to Acquarone

But the role of the Princess of Piedmont in the events surrounding July 25 was not limited to this. Maria José was also very active in trying to weave and expand the network of contacts between the various anti-fascist groups (especially among the senatorial and intellectual aristocracy, the economic and military groups, and the more strictly political groups headed by the so-called Committee of Anti-Fascist Forces) and to act, to some extent, as a point of contact and

An intervention by ^{the Senate} made it clear to the princess that she had her own "plan" (evidently partially different from that of the civilian members of the opposition, who, all intent on removing Mussolini and bringing Italy out of the conflict, did not approach the issue of relations with t h e Germans a n d their reactions with sufficient realism) a n d made no secret of her hostility towards Badoglio, so much so that Maria José noted in her diary: "unfortunately· he hates Badoglio"² The radical nature of this hostility became apparent the following month, when the plan for a collective move by all t h e knights of the Santissima Annunziata linked to the opposition (Caviglia, Badoglio, Thaon di Revel, Orlando, Bonomi, a n d Marquis Guglielmo Imperiali) fell through due t o Caviglia's refusal to do anything with Badoglio·

Also in the first half of April, the princess managed to help facilitate Spataro's first exploratory contacts with ^{Badoglio}. The impression that the Catholic representative gained from these contacts was, all in all, disappointing: the marshal (who had been received by Victor Emmanuel III on March 6) made it clear that he would only take action

"by order and with the support of the king." Nevertheless, they are very significant for us, both because they confirm the Catholic group's long-standing support for Badoglio and because it was with them that relations began between the marshal and the leadership of the constitutional opposition (the Roman group a r o u n d Bonomi, De Gasperi, Ruini, Orlando, which was linked to those of Soleri in Piedmont, Casati in Lombardy, a n d Croce in Naples), which ultimately led him t o focus on Badoglio with the idea of making him, albeit within a broader context in which the sovereign could not fail to be the linchpin, the instrument for achieving, at the moment of Mussolini's removal, the establishment of a political government that would also sanction the total liquidation of the fascist regime (including its moderate exponents) a n d the direct transition from it to a liberal-democratic anti-fascist regime. The subsequent phases of the relationship between the Committee of Anti-Fascist Forces a n d Badoglio are eloquent i n this regard. They allow us to understand the error of judgement made by the anti-fascists in focusing on Badoglio: instead of making him their instrument, the Committee, by staking everything on him, on the one hand strengthened him in the eyes of the king, who, deep down, distrusted him, a n d , on the other hand, put itself in a position where it could not even have that

room for maneuver that he might have had if he had chosen a less unscrupulous man, determined to play only his own game, exploiting everyone in his position.

Extremely cautious at first with everyone and determined to wait until the time was ripe (the diary of Count Danilo De Micheli, a Florentine liberal connected with Aldobrando Medici Tornaquinci's group and Ettore Trombetti's Bolognese shareholders' group, who had numerous meetings with the marshal in 1942-43, is symptomatic testimony of this), but at the same time very careful to make it clear to everyone, regardless of their political leanings, that he was ready to play the game, presenting himself as a *band*, above all, having his trusted men present him in the most reassuring and even captivating light, *and* in some cases even putting himself forward as a candidate. Badoglio only really began to take action after Ambrosio was appointed Chief of the General Staff, the king, whom he had not seen since he was dismissed, received him again, *and* the capitulation of the Axis forces in Tunisia made an Allied landing on metropolitan territory seem imminent: in practice, he only really began to take action in mid-May. It was in fact after this time, *and* especially after the king had received Bonomi *and* Soleri (on June 2 *and* 18, respectively) *and* after he had had another meeting on May 18 with Princess Maria José, he must have learned that, according to the British ambassador to the Holy See, London was in favor of a monarchical solution *and* that a rapid Italian withdrawal from the war would be met with "considerable compensation" from the Allies. His contacts intensified *and* his discourse with the Committee of Anti-Fascist Forces took on a tone that could be seen as challenging. He agreed with Bonomi to set up a political government *and*, when the king and Acquarone declared themselves strongly opposed to this solution, he immediately accepted the counterproposal by Bonomi *and* Casati for a mixed government, chaired by him, with Bonomi as vice president *and* the ministers chosen by him for the military *and* by Bonomi for the political ones by Bonomi from among the six anti-fascist parties. The only non-military name he proposed — it is difficult to say whether because he knew it was wanted in high places or because, in any case, he wanted to put

To play it safe and avoid the risk that, if the government were formed, the anti-fascists could directly manage the armistice negotiations, Guariglia was appointed Foreign Minister. "all the more so," he said with his usual Machiavellianism, "since one of us [Guariglia being ambassador to Turkey and therefore unable to take up his post immediately] will be able to take over the Foreign Ministry *on an interim basis* and immediately proceed to set out Italy's new international policy." He went so far as to say to Bonomi, again on July 17, after being received once more by the sovereign two days earlier and when he could no longer have any doubt that he would be the chosen one and that Victor Emmanuel III absolutely did not want a government of *revenants*, but rather a government "without political color," composed of military personnel and "technicians," that "did not intend to form a ministry different from the one agreed with him and therefore considered his task to be complete." Finally, when the opposition no longer had the time or room for maneuver to try to counter the operation in any way, he let it be understood that he had been *convinced* by Acquarone (the same Acquarone who in those same days was sarcastically saying that Badoglio would form "any" ministry...) to accept the sovereign's point of view; and - to complete the work and sow confusion and division among the anti-fascists, thus putting them completely out of the game - to blow up, with Acquarone, the weakest links in the Committee: Soleri, convincing him to accept the sovereign's point of view and to propose some names for the "technical" ministries, Orlando, involving him personally in the drafting of the proclamation that was to announce the coup d'état and, at the same time, the continuation of the war alongside Germany.

At this point, the knot to be untangled remains that of Vittorio Emanuele III's position; only in this way is it possible to understand, on the one hand, the behavior of Ambrosio and, therefore, of the military, and, on the other hand, that of Mussolini himself.

It is our firm belief that in order to truly understand the attitude of Victor Emmanuel III and, in particular, his behavior in the events that led to July 25, the best approach is to start from their political motivations. Such a statement may seem strange, so it is best to clarify its meaning immediately. Deep down, the sovereign certainly hoped that the monarchy would emerge unscathed from the storm that was shaking and threatening to shake Italy even more, and consequently, he hoped that left-wing tendencies, parties, and republican sentiments would not gain too much ground.

on national life "after Mussolini" and, therefore, in government. From this perspective, he would not have viewed unfavorably a de-fascistization of the regime that did not completely liquidate it, nor a reuse of the moderate fascist ruling class, including the political class. Equally certainly, however, these political concerns were secondary to him, almost "necessary acts" pertaining to his function as sovereign and his dynastic "duties."

What determined his attitude and behavior was something else. It was a series of character and psychological issues, some of which had always been typical of him, others which had manifested themselves or become more acute in recent years, essentially those of the war, which led him to conceive in a very particular way both reality in general and the men in particular on whom it was based, as well as his own function as sovereign and the very destiny of the dynasty.

What characterized Vittorio Emanuele III's personality was essentially—as already mentioned—a mixture of profound skepticism and extreme realism, which often resulted in cynicism and contributed to making him a man who was, on the one hand, extremely lucid and cold, and on the other hand, solitary and distrustful, who essentially despised everyone and lived his role as a duty to be performed according to strict rules, which he reduced to the bare bones of the most arid and absolute formalism, considering it essentially useless.

His relationship with fascism and Mussolini had certainly never been easy or straightforward, and there had been no shortage of friction and even harsh clashes. Despite their profound psychological and cultural differences, the sovereign and the "Duce" shared certain character traits, which meant that, despite the friction and conflicts, the two fundamentally liked, respected, and admired each other, even if their relationship was tinged with a sort of mutual sense of inferiority. Paradoxically, Italy's participation in the war alongside Germany, to which the king had been opposed until almost the moment of intervention and which he had accepted *reluctantly and* with the deep conviction that, however it ended, the conflict would mark the end of the monarchy, had increased this mutual personal esteem and respect. Once the decision to intervene had been taken, Victor Emmanuel III had assumed - as we have already mentioned - an attitude of total patriotism ("the war must be fought to the end") and absolute loyalty to Mussolini, who had made cre-

greatly increased his personal esteem and respect for the "Duce."¹ This, in turn, helps explain why Mussolini—despite warnings to the contrary from many quarters—continued to place his trust in him until the very end. Nor can it be said that, despite the course of the war and some of his criticisms of Mussolini, the sovereign did not feel much the same way. In this regard, it is certainly significant that, as late as June 18, 1943, in a conversation with General Puntoni, he let slip: "Yet that man has a great mind!"

With regard to the issue at hand, however, the king's personal relationship with Mussolini is a secondary factor, which only becomes relevant in relation to the very last stages of the events of July 25: Mussolini's arrest at Villa Savoia. What is important is something else. On the one hand, consistent with his profound skepticism and extreme realism, it is the sovereign's intimate, radical conviction of the substantial futility of anything that could now be done. The war was lost and there was no way out for Italy or, essentially, for the monarchy (and, on this second point, it should not be forgotten that the king had little regard for his son and considered his daughter-in-law to be fanatical and scheming). For a brief moment—roughly until April—he too had to hope for a German-Soviet agreement that would end the war in the East and allow all Axis forces to be concentrated against the Anglo-Americans. A revealing note by De Bono dated April 9, after he had been received in audience by the king, reads: "The king too is counting on a possible agreement between Hitler and Stalin." Once this hope had faded, he never harbored any illusions about the possibility of reaching some agreement with the Germans that would allow Italy to disengage from Germany without being turned into a battlefield and exposed to Hitler's wrath. And,

Similarly, he never placed any trust in the Allies' statements and assurances that they were only fighting fascism and had nothing against the Italian people. His reaction is typical:

On June 17, when the Holy See informed him that it had learned from official sources that what Roosevelt had said in his message to the Italian people after the conquest of Pantelleria—namely, that Mussolini and his regime were solely responsible for the war and not the Italian people, and that the Allies hoped that the Italians would break their ties with the Germans and establish a free government—corresponded to the real intentions of the Allies and that the monarchy was well regarded in London and Washington. To Nuncio Borgongini Duca, who had gone to inform him personally, he said that he feared a "trick": "instead of hanging you, we will cut off your head..."¹ He had even less confidence in the statements of exiles such as Sforza, who on September 1, 1942, sent him a letter urging him to save Italy and the monarchy by changing the government and asking to negotiate a separate peace, assuring him, in addition to the "indulgent consent of the patriots," that the Allies harbored "no hatred or resentment" toward the Italian people.

In addition to this, if we truly want to understand the sovereign's attitude, we need to take two other things into account. Firstly, his extreme legal and constitutional formalism, a formalism that he had already demonstrated on other occasions and which can obviously be judged harshly, but which it would be wrong to consider a ploy to evade problems and shirk his responsibilities, since, on the contrary, it was inherent in his understanding of his role as constitutional sovereign and the duties that derived from it. Contemporary memoirs offer such rich and consistent documentation on this subject that there can be no room for doubt. Among the many quotations that could be cited, the most significant seems to us to be this one, given that the occasion on which the king uttered these words (Senator Gorla's farewell visit after his departure from the government on February 6) had no connection with the political situation or with any request for the sovereign to intervene in it:

The Italians can blame me for anything except for being an unconstitutional king. I have never failed in my duties and I have never exceeded my prerogatives.

This meant that "the king reigns, but does not govern"; any intervention on his part in the sphere of government can only take place in constitutional forms and at the request of the bodies constitutionally designated for this purpose. Moreover, this extreme legal formalism was so ingrained in him that traces of it can be found in all kinds of situations, even in relation to events that were certainly not constitutionally relevant and, at times, in ways that seem laughable to us. Consider the explanation—somewhat sincere and somewhat hypocritical at the same time—that he gave on July 25 to his loyal aide-de-camp, General Puntoni, as to why he had kept him in the dark about the decision, which had been maturing in recent days, to dismiss Mussolini and have him arrested:

Until the very end, given your status as an active-duty general, I wanted you to stay out of it. Mussolini is Minister of War, and you report to the minister. Any direct or indirect involvement on your part in this affair could be considered a veritable conspiracy. I would never have allowed that...

Finally, the second thing to bear in mind is that Vittorio Emanuele III, while he disliked and mistrusted almost everyone, was particularly critical of the pre-fascist political class, whose limitations, mistakes, and, not infrequently, subsequent capitulations during the years of the triumphant regime he knew well. Hence his lack of sympathy and distrust (from which only a few Piedmontese politicians, such as Soleri and Rossini, with whom he could speak in dialect and about the little things that made up *his* world, the one he loved and they loved too, were partially spared) for those he called the *revenants*, small men out of touch with reality, gullible, eager only to return to power and take their revenge, and who could not be trusted in any respect, not in terms of realism and political ability, not in terms of loyalty to the monarchy, not in terms of discretion. The latter was a quality to which the sovereign attached enormous importance, especially when it came to his personal relationships and thoughts.

All other aspects must be viewed in light of these character traits: his political intentions, his behavior during those months, his close attention to military events and their repercussions in the country and in various sectors of the political world, both fascist and opposition, his critical judgment of everyone and his distrust of almost everyone, with the sole exception of the Minister of the Royal Household, Acquarone, whom he had come to appreciate over several years, above all for his organizational skills, but who—knowing the sovereign very well—had every opportunity to exploit his

Siderio decided for himself and with the utmost discretion (not to say in solitude) everything he considered to be his duty and exercised a discreet but exclusive influence over him, which was certainly not decisive but would prove to be considerable, since, for better or worse, he was almost his only link with the other figures involved in the whole affair, and he undoubtedly knew how to make good use of this privileged position for his own projects and political ambitions.

On June 1, 1944, in a letter to Acquarone inspired by obvious political
the moment,

On November 1, his real concern was to urge him to lobby Mussolini to bring back troops from outside Italy, as he was worried about the shortage of available forces. He had also asked him—as we have already mentioned—for "a lot from Washington and London," advising him "to cherish any thread that could be re-knotted, even if it was as thin as a spider's web." Too little, in truth, to see anything more than the reflection of concerns that were as natural as they were generic. Especially when one considers that on the following January 13 (after a visit of more than ten days to the troops stationed in Sicily), speaking with Cavallero about the possible conclusions of the war, he told him "that Italy has the greatest interest in prolonging our efforts as long as possible because we would have nothing to gain from a compromise peace" ^{and}, more importantly, that even at the end of May he would still be opposed to establishing contact with the Allies. Moreover, a few days after the king's conversation with Ciano, on November 26, Puntoni, speaking with Generals Scuero (who was concerned because there was no "strong hand at the helm of the country" and eager to know if "a decisive gesture by the sovereign" was to be expected) and Maglione (who even spoke of the advisability of a military dictatorship), told them that the situation was "neither serious nor ripe" as they thought and that "only in a desperate case" could the sovereign intervene: "for now, it is good that His Majesty remains above everything so that he can one day be the arbiter of events."

Even more indicative are the elements available to us for the period from February to mid-May, the months in which the German crisis in Russia was unfolding in all its severity and Italy was losing its last positions in North Africa. As a result, steps were taken more frequently on the king, Acquatone, and Puntoni to urge the Crown to intervene. During this period, Victor Emmanuel III not only refrained from 'confiding' in anyone, i.e. revealing his hand, but also became irritated with those who 'dramatized' the situation too much and would have liked to

"rush things." This was the case, for example, with the old General Zupelli, Minister of War in 1915-16 and in 1918, who on February 23 had suggested that he should encourage a coup d'état and "get rid of Mussolini immediately." At the end of the conversation, the king said to ^{Puntoni} in an annoyed tone:

The situation is serious, but not desperate, both militarily and politically. A new development can always intervene to radically overturn situations that appear to have no way out. In any case, a coup against the Duce and the regime at this moment, with Germany at the doorstep, is absolutely inappropriate. For now, there is only one thing to do: resist the enemy at all costs and maintain a line of conduct in domestic politics that is morally upright, without intrigue or underhanded dealings.

And, following this logic, the following month, he made a controversial remark—as we have already mentioned—even about that "gentleman" Ambrosio, "who does not mince his words" and who spoke to him about the opportunity to force Mussolini to leave power: "He says what he thinks, but this approach is not always a good one." And, even more so, he was careful not to respond in any way to those outside the close circle of military leaders who came to him to point out the seriousness of the situation and to urge, explicitly or indirectly, that he take decisive action. He listened to them, said nothing in response, thanked them, and dismissed them. At most, he told some of them that he had faith in "his king." He did not even break his silence with his relatives. At the beginning of May, for example, when talking to the Count of Turin, he not only appeared "somewhat secretive" to him, but in response to his criticism of Mussolini, he showed that he still had faith in him. When they came to talk about the popular demonstration on the 5th under Palazzo Venezia, he said in a polemical tone: "There were still fifty thousand people applauding the Duce in Piazza Venezia the other day... I don't want to start a civil war"

Of course, as the situation became more serious, the need to do something was beginning to dawn on him too, but without prompting him to make any decision, much less a definitive one, and even less to run the risk of suggesting that he agreed with those who were urging him to act, and thus giving them the pretext to move in the direction they desired. This was all the more so because, perhaps, at that moment, rather than acting directly, he was perhaps thinking of resorting—if it was really necessary—to some expedient that, for the time being, could resolve the problem of Mussolini's permanence in power, without giving his removal an explicitly political meaning, so as not to arouse too much suspicion and, therefore, German countermeasures, and at the same time not to humiliate the 'Duce' too much. If we can give credence to what Cavi-

He confided this to Alberto Pirelli on February 23 (and this is not surprising, given that Vittorio Emanuele III, despite feeling strongly about his "role" and his "duties" as sovereign and his responsibilities towards the dynasty, did not care about the throne at all and felt its full weight, other things being closer to his heart, things that were much smaller but more satisfying for him): the sovereign did in fact consider for a moment abdicating in favor of his son Umberto, thus bringing about a situation that would have formally led to the resignation of the head of government and made his retirement and replacement by one of *the leaders* of moderate fascism "normal," cutting off the ambitions of the old *revenant* politicians.

Whether or not the news confided by Caviglia to Pirelli was true (but rumors of the sovereign's intention to abdicate in favor of his son or even his grandson are frequently reported in the memoirs and diaries of the time), what is significant is that it was in this situation that Victor Emmanuel was persuaded to begin meeting with some of his opponents. On March 6, he received Badoglio (whom, as usual, he dismissed after listening to him without comment) and ten days later, speaking with Puntoni, he said that it was no longer necessary to hide "the need for decisive action with regard to men and things," but he immediately added that it was also necessary to "choose the right moment" and avoid "at all costs" rash decisions. "A mistake in choosing the timing could be fatal for the country." Undoubtedly valid concerns, but in light of his overall behavior, they reveal that at their root was above all the sovereign's skepticism about the real usefulness of what he could have done and, consequently, his turning to a sort of philosophy whereby doing nothing became the lesser of two evils, the way to keep all options open and, perhaps, to find a completely unexpected one open at a certain moment. Symptomatic of this last point is his aforementioned reference, even on July 14, to the possibility of Mussolini's death, which "would facilitate the resolution of very important issues," made to Puntoni, who reported to him the rumor of an imminent trip by the "Duce" to Sicily to visit the fighting troops.

In any case, everything suggests that Vittorio Emanuele III actually began to consider withdrawing from the war around mid-May. He must have been influenced by a number of closely related factors. First of all, the loss of the ul-

positions still held by Axis forces in Tunisia, which made an Allied landing on Italian soil extremely likely in the near future. Secondly, there was a proliferation of requests to the king to intervene personally in the situation: it was during this period, among other things, that Tommaso Gallarati Scotti addressed a noble letter of appeal to the sovereign on behalf of the Milanese liberal opposition. This increase in pressure was matched by an increase in contacts and initiatives by various opposition groups, which found support in increasingly broad and important circles — which Victor Emmanuel III could not ignore, especially since Acquafredda — having overcome his final uncertainties — had now decided to take the field himself to induce him, if not yet to act — for the Minister of the Royal Household had to mature this decision only about a month later, when he became convinced that otherwise the monarchy could no longer be saved — at least to make contact with the political opposition and was now the direct link between them and the Quirinale^a and therefore had every interest in informing him in detail of what was developing. Thirdly, the step taken on May 12 by the Holy See regarding Mussolini must also have contributed to persuading the sovereign to consider the question of Mussolini's removal, in an attempt to get him to take some initiative and make him understand (but without offering itself in any way) that it could act as a possible intermediary with the Allies. This is all the more likely given that it is difficult to believe that Ciano did not in some way inform the sovereign of the conversation that took place on the same day as the move (which the Holy See had not made to the king alone out of prudence, because, as Monsignor Tardini noted: "now that many are hoping for the King to intervene against Mussolini, we must avoid the Holy Father appearing, in one way or another, as a supporter of such a pious

no") with Cardinal Maglione and the considerations made on that occasion. Finally, it cannot be ruled out that, through the Carabinieri, the sovereign was not informed of the first signs of that process (which would develop mainly in June and reach its peak after July 1, but which was already taking shape) of a shift in large sectors of public opinion from the hopes hitherto placed in the monarchy to an attitude of condemnation of its "passive resignation."¹

In mid-May, three notes were written by the king² in which the international and political-military situation in general, and that of Italy in particular, were summarized with extreme clarity and realism. However, their conclusion appears once again disappointing and wait-and-see:

Everything must now be done to keep the country united, and not to make rhetorical speeches with a purely fascist background.

Close ties must be maintained with Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, which have little affection for the Germans; - we should not forget to extend every courtesy to the leaders of the British and American governments. Serious consideration should be given to the possible need to separate Italy's fate from that of Germany, whose internal collapse could be as sudden as the collapse of the German Empire in 1918.

For Vittorio Emanuele III, in fact, addressing the issue of ending the war did not mean either tackling it in concrete terms or considering it closely linked to the elimination of Mussolini and fascism. The three notes are dated May 15, while Puntoni's diary entry for the 19th^{reads}:

During our usual meeting, the Sovereign confided his doubts to me, saying: "I fear that at any moment the British government or the King of England may approach me directly to negotiate a separate peace. This would put me in a very awkward position. If this were to happen, I would act without subterfuge and discuss it with the Duce in order to agree on the course of action to be taken."

And Vittorio Emanuele III did not have to deviate from this course of action even in the following weeks. Puntoni's notes between

June 1 and July 1 leave little room for doubt (nor can it be assumed that the first aide-de-camp was kept in the dark about certain things), nor were Acquarone and Ambrosio ever able to provide convincing evidence to the contrary, limiting themselves, in line with the king's letter to the former dated June 1, 1944, to stating generically that the sovereign had made his decision in January-February. Under the date of June 1-2-3 in Puntoni's diary we read:

The overall military situation is worsening due to continuous and massive enemy bombing across the peninsula and islands. We are no longer able to counter the enemy's air force. As a result of this state of affairs, the internal situation is also becoming more precarious by the day [...]. The Crown's position is difficult, as many expect the King to take action that he is unable to take, at least for the moment. Premature intervention could lead to disaster, both militarily and politically, not only because of the nature of the current government but also because of the presence of German troops in Italy [...]. His Majesty, who is keeping a close eye on what is happening, is no longer the same as he was a month ago. He is aware of the gravity of the situation and is considering what to do, but I believe that, at least for now, he is still determined to support Mussolini's actions. The plan that His Majesty is working out in his head is a mystery to everyone; I don't think even Acquarone is aware of it.

And if we move on to this other note, dated July 5, we see that its substance is not very ^{different}:

Since General Ambrosio has requested an audience, the King decides to return to Rome [from S. Rossore, where he had been since June 30] and sets the meeting for tomorrow at 5 p.m. It is on this occasion that His Majesty speaks to me for the first time about the action being taken by the Chief of Staff to replace Mussolini. It seems that he has spoken openly with the King about it, suggesting the possibility of a military dictatorship headed by Cavaglia or Badoglio. However, His Majesty did not listen to these plans with much enthusiasm. My impression is that he considers their implementation still premature and dangerous, especially with regard to the military situation. He tells me, however, that Cavaglia's rise to power would mean a decisive return to Freemasonry and a consequent rapprochement with the Anglo-Americans. His Majesty is of the opinion that even if Mussolini were to be replaced, fascism cannot be overthrown in one fell swoop. Instead, it would have to be gradually modified until its appearance in those aspects that have proved harmful to the country is changed. He recognizes, on the other hand, that Badoglio, despite having a character that he does not like, still has a certain following among the masses, and this following could be the only catalyst for the situation. "I have the impression," says His Majesty, "that Ambrosio is revealing too much and has too many contacts with elements outside the military environment."

And the same conclusion can be reached, especially if it is supplemented with what Acquatone allegedly said a week later to Alessandro ^{Casati}:

We must proceed gradually, bringing down Mussolini but not confronting fascism as a whole. As for the war, we must not aim to end it at any cost. On the contrary, we must immediately declare that the war will continue and call on all Italians to continue it with vigor. Later, we will see how best to bring it to an end.

And, above all, if we bear in mind what Ambrosio had told Badoglio after the meeting on July 6, namely that the king had not made any ^{decision}, and if we also consider that on the 9th the sovereign left for San Rossore (from where, however, he had to return immediately to Rome following the Allied landing in Sicily), almost certainly for the sole purpose of postponing "until his return" an audience that Badoglio had requested immediately after learning of the negative outcome of Ambrosio's move

In fact, the only change in the sovereign's behavior between mid-May and early July was his decision to receive some members of the political opposition who had been insisting for some time, mainly through the Princess of Piedmont and the lawyer Storoni, on having an audience with Acquatone. But, as everything suggests, this was done with the sole purpose of keeping them in check in some way and with the hope of thus

"keep the country united." It would be difficult to explain why, even with Bonomi and Soleri, whom he received ^{on June} 2 and 1, respectively, and even with Senators Guido Pasolini Dall'Onda and Edoardo Rotigliano, whom he received on June 18 and 26 and who must have considered their political positions more congenial to his own and certainly, despite their close relations at that time with Bergamini, Casati, and Della Torretta, who were not *revenants*, he continued to maintain his usual hermetic attitude: he listened to them, made no comments, gave no indication of his intentions, and limited himself to a generic invitation to Pasolini Dall'Onda to trust him.

As predictable and expected as it was, not even the Allied landing in Sicily Vittorio Emanuele III to truly change his attitude. At first, its only real effect was probably to induce him to end the game with the *revenants* who, as soon as they heard about the landing, had begun to increase the pressure (mainly through

the usual Acquarone) aimed at persuading him to stop procrastinating, proposing for this purpose solutions that were not only absurd and complicated (not least that of calling elections), but also completely ^{unrealistic}. Faced with them, he must have thought it better to resurrect Badoglio. It must have been thus that on the afternoon of July 15, he resigned himself, partly due to Acquarone's insistence, to receiving Badoglio and, overcoming his distrust of the marshal (according to Acquatone: he feared him to be "an aspiring ruler of Italy"), he made it clear that he would be the new head of government, but he did not go much further: he made it clear that he was absolutely opposed to a political government, especially one made up of *revenants*, and as for how and when to proceed with Mussolini's replacement, he was careful not to go into specifics, limiting himself to rejecting Badoglio's suggestions and stating that "coup d'états planned for a fixed date are unlikely to succeed" and that, at least initially, an armistice should not be sought. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that he went into specifics with Acquarone and Ambrosio. And this while, as early as July 13, the temperature within the Fascist leadership group had begun to rise and was approaching boiling point.

And, in fact, something very similar to a real decision Vittorio Emanuele only took it on the morning of the 20th and more likely on the 22nd (although Acquarone informed Ambrosio of this on the afternoon of the 20th, but it is symptomatic that he only confirmed it to Senise on the 22nd) after receiving Mussolini on his return from Feltre and having tried in vain - according to what the sovereign told ^{Puntoni}, but according to Mussolini, on the other hand, the king told him that the military situation could not hold out any longer and that it was necessary to "put the dilemma to the Germans" - to make him understand that only he was now hindering "internal recovery" and "a clear definition" of the military situation. Let's say something very similar to a

A real decision and not a decision in the true sense of the word, because on July 20-22, as far as we know, it was only decided ^{approximately}¹ that Mussolini's arrest should take place on the following Monday, July 26 (other sources say July 29), when the "Duce" would go to the Quirinale for the usual audience for the royal signature. A n d it is by no means certain that the date would have been respected.

The king had to make the "decision" all by himself, consulting at most with Acquatone: Ambrosio never saw him between July 14 and 26, and the chief of staff owed what he knew to Acquatone, with whom he apparently met only once during this period, on the afternoon of ^{the 20th}. W h a t prompted the king t o make his decision was not so much the outcome of the Feltre conference as two pieces of news brought t o his attention between July 17 a n d 18: the news, sent to him by Bastianini, that attempts were being made to establish contact with the Allies in order to sound out their intentions a n d availability, a n d the one communicated on the afternoon of July 17 by Senator Aldo Rossini to Acquatone that Farinacci was plotting with t h e Germans to have him a n d Mussolini set aside a n d transfer power t o Kesselring. I t i s likely that the two pieces of news, albeit for different reasons, must have struck him deeply a n d led him t o reconsider his attitude; however, despite their seriousness, they did not necessitate immediate action, especially for a man like him. The first still left some margin of time, a n d the second, if true, d i d not necessarily require immediate decisions, provided the situation could be kept under control. Symptomatic of this perspective is the fact that, while on July 21, General Carboni was appointed commander of the motorized corps being formed near the capital with the task of defending it from possible fascist a n d German actions (which could refer both to Mussolini's arrest and to Farinacci's plots), on the 22nd, t h e plans for Mussolini's arrest a n d the measures to be taken against the leading figures of the Fascist Party, the National Fascist Party, a n d the Militia were still so vague, despite the plan prepared at the beginning of the month by Castellano, that Acquatone a s k e d Senise to prepare one himself, a n d on the 23rd, speaking with Pirelli 'in the utmost secrecy but without reticence' about the possible composition of the government that would replace Mussolini's, he expressed concern above all a b o u t 'the problem of the timing a n d method of the coup' a n d certain other issues.

Unresolved "technical" issues (such as control of the telephone switchboard at

Ministry of the Interior)¹ all this suggests a sudden decision, imposed by unforeseen circumstances. But the main reason for doubting that the date of July 26, "set" for Mussolini's arrest, can be considered definitive is, in our opinion, another.

Vittorio Emanuele III and Mussolini gave two very different versions of their conversation on the morning of July 22. This is not surprising; what is perplexing is their extreme laconicism, as if both wanted to talk about it as little as possible. And, if we accept the king's version as true, it is somewhat surprising to read in Ortona's diary that, on his return from the royal audience, Mussolini was "completely calm and relaxed." But the real point is another: it is absolutely unbelievable that, whatever the course of the conversation, neither the sovereign nor Mussolini made any mention of the soundings that Bastianini was trying to make with the Allies. This is all the more so given that on October 18, 1943, Badoglio, in a report to several hundred officers gathered in Agro San Giorgio Jonico to counter the arguments of Salò propaganda, which accused the armistice of treason, let slip, in the heat of the moment, a statement that has never been denied:

But enough is enough, let's get out of this mess! Mussolini had told the king that he would go to Feltre on July 19 to inform Hitler of Italy's desperate situation and ask for an armistice. But, in the presence of Foreign Minister Bastianini and General Ambrosio, who is here and can confirm this, he did not have the courage to open his mouth. I'll tell you more: Hitler didn't let him speak! It had always been like that for ten years... Back in Rome, Mussolini assured the king that, in any case, he would break away from Germany by September 15. Ambrosio, who is here, knows this, and so do several Fascist ministers who remained there, I no longer know whether they are Mussolini's friends or enemies or persecuted. And the funny thing is that now that I have done this, I am being accused of treason!

As we have said many times, Badoglio's statements should almost always be taken with a grain of salt, but it is a fact that this one, in a sense, has never been denied—not even when, on December 29, 1944, the sea-shal in the Commission of Inquiry for the failure to defend Rome said he did not remember from whom he had learned the news, but did not rule out that he could have learned it from the sovereign himself⁴—and attempts were made to pass it over in silence and forget it, and, on the other hand, it appears extremely credible: both because, as has been said, the versions of Vittorio Emanuele III and Mussolini on their conversation of July 22 leave much to be desired and give the impression of being substantially reticent, and because only

In light of this—but we will return to this in greater detail later—it is possible to explain Mussolini's hope, on July 25, that the sovereign would still be favorable to him despite the vote of the Grand Council. But then there can only be one conclusion: the king only took the *real* decision to arrest Mussolini as a result of the news of the approval of the Grandi agenda (which, not surprisingly, the military authorities prevented the press from publishing for several days) and in order not to find himself exposed or involved, depending on the circumstances, in the inevitable consequences that this would have had. For, although he certainly could not take a position in favor of Mussolini against the Grand Council, despite all his legal and constitutional formalism, Victor Emmanuel III could not possibly appear to be under pressure from the fascists themselves. Faced with this possibility, he had to act personally. This is essentially what Badoglio always admitted in his speech of October 18, 1943:

Well, fascism was not overthrown by us: by His Majesty or by me. Fascism fell, not because of external forces, but because of its internal crisis: it could no longer resist. It was brought down by the members of the Grand Council themselves. On the evening of July 24, the members of the Fascist Grand Council voted by a majority against Mussolini. And that marked the end. Finally!

We will have to return to Badoglio's testimony to try to establish its reliability and, if positive, the meaning to be attributed to the term *ad quem* of September 15 put into Mussolini's mouth by the marshal. However, what interests us most now, in order to have all the pieces needed to reconstruct the sovereign's behavior as accurately as possible, is Badoglio's last statement, which we have quoted, namely that fascism, contrary to what Acquatone and the most determined supporters of the monarchy claimed, was not essentially overthrown by Victor Emmanuel III but by the Grand Council. This statement confirms the idea that what determined the king's decision, made him break his hesitation and, therefore, dismiss Mussolini and give orders for his arrest, was the news of the convening of the Grand Council and the agenda prepared by Grandi. Hence the need, before concluding the reconstruction of the king's attitude and, with it, resolving the Ambrosio issue, to also look at that of the more strictly fascist leadership of the regime and how it influenced the behavior of Victor Emmanuel III.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, Mussolini's return on December 2, 1942, to the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, to life

Politics had put an end to the hopes and fears, rumors, and actual maneuvers within the fascist leadership that had been sparked by the prospect of the death or retirement of the "Duce." However, the tension had only eased superficially. In reality, everything contributed to fueling and increasing it, because there were too many unmistakable signs that the cracks in the internal front were deepening and multiplying. The regime, fascism, and Mussolini himself were losing credibility day by day: people were turning away from them, tending to ignore them as much as possible and, even if they did not become *outright* anti-fascists, they looked to others and placed their last hopes in the monarchy and the Church. The regime's propaganda and appeals fell increasingly on deaf ears and, in fact, ended up having a counterproductive effect: they irritated and were 'misunderstood', i.e., taken as further demonstrations of the unsustainability of the situation, of Italy's increasing dependence on Germany, of the inevitability of defeat and of the need to save what could be saved, i.e., to avoid at least further mourning, further destruction, further sacrifices. Nor at the level of the ruling class

¹ A small but significant example of the void that was created around Mussolini is the fact that many book and record publishers, who until then had been in the habit of sending their publications to the Duce's secretariat as they were released, began to stop sending them or to send them only sporadically (Mondadori, Garzanti), so much so that on April 26, Mussolini's secretariat contacted the Ministry of Popular Culture to report the matter and invite it to intervene with the publishers (ACS, *Min. Cultura Popolare*, b. 11, fase. 151).

² Particularly counterproductive (to the point that Ambrosio, then Chief of Staff of the Army, had already taken action against Cavallero on this matter) were Mario Appellius's "comments on the events of the day." Their violence, the language used (typical of his recurring exclamation "God damn the British"), and his ostentatious confidence in the victory of the Tripartite Pact, instead of lifting spirits, had the effect of irritating and depressing them even more. Typical of this is a note to Pavolini dated November 25, 1942: "Appellius has really attracted the antipathy, not to say hatred, of the Italians. Especially in recent times, with his challenges to enemy aviators, followed by the bombings of Genoa and Turin, no one can stand to hear him speak anymore, while, as they say, in Piedmont and Liguria, there are even those who hold him responsible for the raids that have taken place because of what he said on the radio."

It is certain that the Italian propaganda service currently has no element less accepted and less tolerated by Appellius' radio listeners than one that everyone would be happy to no longer hear (see ACS, *Ministry of Popular Culture, Cabinet*, b. 2, file 11, "Mario Appellius"; b. 119, file 17, "Comments on current events";

U. CAVALLERO, *Diary*, op. cit., p. 673 (January 14, 1943); P. V. CANNISTRARO, *La fabbrica del consenso*, op. cit., pp. 2 f&g;5 "gg"; E. MONTELEONE, *La radio italiana nel periodo fascista*, op. cit., pp. 209 ff.; A. MONTICONE, *Fascism at the Microphone*, pp. 230 ff.).

Also noteworthy is the case of Virginio Gayda, editor of *Il giornale d'Italia*. His case clearly illustrates the confusion, uncertainty, bewilderment, and contradictions that now dominated those responsible for propaganda. On February 17, Gayda published an article, *Resistenza*, which was so realistic that many considered it "defeatist" and which was taken up and skillfully exploited by British propaganda. This led to Gayda being banned from signing his articles for over a month. As Gayda wrote to Mussolini on March 15 to protest the measure taken against him, he was convinced that at that moment it was necessary not to appease the Italian people, not to hide the seriousness of the situation from them, but on the contrary to make them aware of it and make them understand why the only way forward was that of resistance to the bitter end: "to invigorate the spirit of the Italian people with a daily message: to persuade them with concrete and intelligible demonstrations that we must resist with serenity and active will, at any cost, because time is on our side: to clearly explain the reasons behind these statements so that even the simplest among us can assimilate them into their consciousness...: dispel pessimism and the corrosive effects of enemy propaganda" (ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943)*, b. 9, fase. 169/R, "Gayda Virginio").

Even more prominent figures in the fascist establishment were not immune to this type of criticism. At the v- On July 25, even Alessandro Pavolini, who, as mentioned above, had taken over the management of *Il Messaggero* after his dismissal from the government in February, was accused of "overestimating the enemy," appealing too much to the "patria superiore alle parti" (the nation above all parties), making "inappropriate" polemical distinctions between fascists and "non-fascists," thus confirming the existence of the latter (see G. TALAMO, *Il "Messaggero." Un giornale durante il fascismo (1919-1946)*, Florence 1984, pp. 325 ff.).

There were no voices to be heard, albeit in cryptic and allusive forms, in this regard¹.

Whatever their individual positions and respective hypotheses about the future, all fascist leaders of a certain importance felt that the situation was becoming increasingly serious and that something had to be done to address it: the greatest danger was immobility, passively and fatalistically accepting the situation without doing anything to resolve it. Most were now convinced that the war was lost and that the consequences had to be faced, but almost no one knew or dared to say what those consequences were and, above all, how to deal with them. They ended up taking it out, more or less openly, on Mussolini, who was doing nothing and who, by his mere presence, was preventing others from taking the decisions that he did not want or could not take. One of the most radical critics was Federzoni, who as early as January 16 confided

In this chaos, the only real initiative, so to speak, implemented in the months leading up to July 25 was that taken by the Istituto Luce, in agreement with the Ministry of Popular Culture, at the end of May "to offer, through cinema and photographic documentation, some insight into the repressive measures adopted in the field of food supply by the competent provincial authorities, namely: images of foodstuffs seized and subsequently distributed to charitable organizations, institutions, company canteens, etc." (ACS, Min. Interno, Dir. gen. P.S., Div. affari gen. e ris., 1943, b. 21, fasc. Ci-AG, sottofasc. "Disciplina prezzi-Disposizioni"). This was really not much, given the circumstances and the inventiveness that had characterized the regime's propaganda in other times.

¹ Perhaps the most significant cases were the conference on authority and freedom, held by Raffaele Guariglia on the eve of his departure to take up the post of ambassador in Ankara, March 17, 1943, at the Angelicum in Rome (see the text in R. GUARIGLIA, *Primi passi in diplomazia e rapporti dall'Ambasciata di Madrid (1932-1934)*, edited by R. Moscati, Naples 1972, pp. 167 ff.), and the article by M. LUCIOLI, *L'insegnamento di Massimo D'Azeglio*, in "Nuova Antologia," April 16, 1943, pp. 241 ff.

At Guariglia's conference, L. PIETROMARCHI, *Diary*, March 27, 1943 (in the *Pietromarchi Archive*) dedicated a very interesting note: "Last Sunday, Ambassador Guariglia gave a lecture entitled 'Freedom and Authority' at the Angelicum of the Dominicans, before an audience estimated, I am told, at 3,000 people. The lecture was eagerly awaited, not only because of some previews given by Guariglia himself, but also because of the courageous approach to post-war problems taken in the lecture on Europe at the Institute of Fascist Culture. Already on that occasion, Ambassador Mackensen, who was present, had made some remarks to the lecturer.

- You fired shots at Germany, he said to him.
- No, replied Guariglia, I put things right.
- I'm not a child, Mackensen replied, I understand perfectly well.

Guariglia, repeating these words, which I had heard, mentioned his lecture at the Angelicum, adding that the Governor of Rome, Prince Giangiacomo Borghese, had warned him with these words: "This will be your last attempt to go into exile." In fact, the lecture, which I read in its entirety in the text provided to me *sous cape* by Alberto Theodoli, was in many places an open stance against the regime of violence, authoritarian systems, movements that disregard public opinion, and government officials who invoke God as if he were at their service. All these points provoked thunderous ovations that underscored their significance.

Fortunately for the speaker, he left the next day for Ankara, before the echoes of his words had spread; otherwise, he would not have avoided the cancellation of his mission. The Duce flew into a rage when he heard about the conference and the demonstrations it had provoked.

² For those who had access to the most confidential information, an important element of the picture was the continuous increase in circulation and the parallel continuous decrease in Treasury reserves, caused by the huge and constant increase in expenditure. In July 1943, provisional data from the Bank of Italy showed an increase in circulation of 1,760.3 million compared to June 30 and a decrease in Treasury funds of 2,261.2 million (ARCHIVIO BANCA D'ITALIA, *Archivio Azzolini*, pr. 4, V. Azzolini to Mussolini, July 22, 1943). Some very brief details on the financial situation were reported after Mussolini's fall at the Council of Ministers meeting on August 5 by the new minister D. Bartolini, see *La situazione finanziaria esposta dal Ministro delle Finanze Domenico Bartolini al Consiglio dei Ministri il 3 agosto 1943*, Rome 1943.

with Bottai: "at least temporarily, withdraw, to make peace negotiations possible, in agreement, of course, with ^{the Germans}." The most explicit was Ciano who, forgetting his heavy responsibilities, even flaunted his aversion to the Germans proclaiming, for at least a year, that he had always been opposed to the war and the corporative system, and was keen to let the Court know that he was "devoted to the king" and saw in the sovereign

"the only reliable leader Italy has" and with his cynicism he managed to disconcert even his closest friends ("given the military defeat, he believes the political victory is still possible," noted ^{Bottai} on February 5). Mussolini's son-in-law did not abandon this attitude even after his removal from ^{the government}. Only a few, such as Ferruccio Lantini, had the moral courage and honesty to make Mussolini aware of their drama as fascists, Italians and, in this particular case, Catholics, their fears for the future of their homeland, their conviction that German policy proved beyond any doubt that Italy and Germany no longer had anything in common, since "the physical notion of *race*, translated into concrete terms in the symbol of blood, is directed against more than two thousand years of civilization, a civilization largely generated by Rome and still bearing the marks of Rome."

In the second half of April and early May—as already mentioned—Senise's replacement at the head of the police and Scorza's appointment to the party leadership seemed for a moment to bring clarity to the situation, indicating a choice and a resumption of internal initiative by fascism. Scorza's activism seemed to restore vitality and vigor to the party (which partly explains why no one on July 25 foresaw its complete collapse without any attempt at resistance) and make it the center of effective national unity. In some, however, the two changes at the top of the police and the party also aroused deep fears, leading, as in the case of the former minister of Italian Africa, Lessona, to their detachment from the regime and their move to the monarchist camp. In any case, the positive impression they made lasted only the classic space of a morning, and indeed, the political line of the new party secretary soon became a further element of confusion.

and division between extremists and moderates. What Scorza failed to do was precipitated by the increasingly urgent military situation. The end of the last pockets of resistance in Tunisia on May 13 and, a month later, the loss of Pantelleria brought the crisis of fascism in general, and of its ruling group in particular, to unprecedented levels. "The situation is dire; there is a sense of disarray," De Bonis noted realistically on June 15.

Diaries, chronicles, memoirs of contemporaries, and police reports offer extensive and consistent documentation on this subject: by mid-May, the crisis had become widespread and chronic, in some cases manifesting itself in overt forms that would have been ^{unthinkable} just a few months earlier. On May 13, the same day as the capitulation in Tunisia, Edoardo Rotigliano, speaking in the Senate on the budget of the Ministry of Popular Culture, did not hesitate to explicitly attack Scorza:

Today, in order to face this danger, the Party Secretary would like to adopt Fascism as the common denominator for all Italians. Despite the uncompromising Fascist faith in his heart, despite his full awareness of the need for the discipline called for by the Party Secretary, allow me to disagree. It is not appropriate today, nor is it useful, above all, to expect Italians to adopt Fascism as their sole common denominator. Unfortunately, this would offer many a moral alibi for not joining the war. No one should dare ask us to fold a single corner of our banners: that would be a true betrayal of our fallen brothers and of ourselves, to which we will never agree. But when, in the tragic hour that our country is going through, the signal for the great gathering sounds, as it must sound once again, may this gathering bring together all Italians under the shadow of the tricolor alone.

And to conclude, so that the meaning of his speech would be even clearer, with an explicit reference to the sovereign and the reading of the proclamation addressed to the nation by Victor Emmanuel III in the aftermath of Caporetto. And Rotigliano's case was certainly not the only one. It was precisely during this period that the number of moderate fascists who began to see the king as their only remaining hope grew, in some cases in ways and tones that offended the sovereign himself. A typical case was that of Carlo del Croix, who on June 1 declared himself, along with Puntoni, a "tenacious and ruthless opponent of Mussolini" ("I consider him capable of the basest actions") and called for the immediate intervention of the king:

While the number of those within the Fascist leadership who now looked only to the king was increasing, many, even among the moderates, still looked to Mussolini, whether they were thinking of a separate peace or—and these were fewer and fewer—of resistance to the bitter end, and still had faith in Germany, or - and these were the majority - who did not know what to do and sought in him a sign, something that was as close as possible to a decision, an end to that state of passivity, lack of initiative, and lack of prospects, in which everything was falling apart and rotting, people were dying, and the country's few remaining riches were being consumed and destroyed. But the "Duce" remained silent, did not gather information, much less act, and those who could approach him found him increasingly aged, ill, at the mercy of a state of mind fraught with contradictions that left little room for hope. In this situation, the general question was: what to do? A question to which, apart from Farinacci and his group and, to some extent, Scorza, no one knew the answer. Not even those who were now betting everything on a decisive intervention by the monarchy, given that time was passing and Victor Emmanuel III showed no signs of intending to act. "And the King is not moving; the Prince of Piedmont is concerned, but he does not believe he can speak, let alone act, out of respect and discipline towards his father... We must not delude ourselves... The Allies will land in Italy... We should negotiate, but Mussolini does not want to and the Allies will never negotiate with him... It's tragic..." Ciano vented to Cardinal Maglione on May 12. As for the others, each one more or less went with the flow and reacted according to their own character. A *loyalist* like Cianetti continued undeterred to run the Ministry of Corporations, pursuing his plans for social renewal as if nothing had happened and almost forcing himself not to see what was happening.

was ^{happening}. An old, passionate squadrist like Perrone Compagni vented his frustration to the first person he came across: "Either the Duce takes action or we will force him to change course with weapons." An intellectual like Bottai recorded and tried to rationalize what was happening and confided it to his ^{diary}:

The political environment is becoming increasingly rarefied, as if people were afraid to see each other. Mussolini is away, on his Caminate marches, but rumors mysteriously place him here and there; some even say he is in Germany with the Crown Prince. It is already being said that Scorza's words are better than his actions, than his deeds. Everything, in this

li) as if nothing had happened. So, all things considered, it is understandable how the most widespread mood ended up being that of a *simple man* like De^{Bono}¹ :

He had the Germans behind him and his own political project, that of Gran-di. But for almost everyone else, the idea of opposing Mussolini was, whatever they said, inconceivable. And not only for the "simple," the "pure," the "loyal." It is certainly not insignificant that even Bottai was still wrestling with the problem of "loyalty" during this period^{and}, although dissatisfied with "Critica fascista" ("I find it incomplete with regard to the truth and, even though it is so diminished and allusive, it is fruitless and dangerous"), he still thought that it could somehow serve to clarify Mussolini's position on the issue of peace and war in a positive way, certainly from a *historical* point of view, as if such a clarification could have any meaning or importance at that moment, or even any concrete political value. This helps to explain why, on July 14, after the landing in Sicily, he still focused his considerations on what to do on Mussolini's remaining in power and did not consider the moment to be such as to warrant a "detachment" of Mussolini and fascism from the country and, therefore, a transfer of the situation to the "competence of the Crown."

Not to mention that – even if they had managed to untangle the Mussolini knot and regain the ability to resume their responsibilities and decide for themselves – a series of objective obstacles stood in the way of their transition to effective political action, obstacles that cannot be underestimated. On the one hand, more than twenty years of life under the regime had created deep divisions within the Fascist leadership, leading to the emergence and entrenchment of opposing groups and personal positions that were now extremely difficult to set aside, if only because of mutual distrust.

On the other hand, the characteristics of the regime's structure made any venue that could in some way legitimize an initiative non-existent or politically unusable for any purpose. Of the four possible forums, the least legitimate, both morally and legally, was certainly the PNF, on which, moreover, it was absurd to place any reliance due to its high degree of bureaucratization and the control exercised over it by Scorza. The Chamber of Fasci and Corporations partly (the members appointed by the PNF) reproduced the same situation that existed in the party, and partly (the members appointed by the Corporations) was too plethoric, fragmented, and difficult to maneuver and, above all, lacked, as "body," of tradition and pride, both because of the constant change of many of its members and because of the underlying anti-parliamentarianism, even towards its own assemblies, that characterized fascism. In many respects, the Senate could have been a more suitable venue, given the prestige it had managed to maintain to some extent, the sense of tradition and pride of "body" that still largely characterized it, its more homogeneous composition, and the presence, in addition to a large number of moderate fascists, of a substantial group of loyal monarchists (some long-standing, some *rallied* in recent months) and a small anti-fascist contingent. In fact, the Senate was also considered, first as a future prospect, when times were not yet irretrievably deteriorating, by Grandi; then, at the moment of the final crisis, by others as well, culminating on July 22, in collecting sixty-one signatures from senators (moderate fascists and monarchists not openly in opposition) under a request to convene the Senate itself in plenary session.

which, in essence, hoped that "the Government and the People would unite around the sacred Person of His Majesty the Emperor, with the unshakeable intention of resisting at all costs," tended to pave the way for Vittorio Emanuele III to resume power and thus compel him to act. But the fact that the Senate - despite everything - was an unusable forum is demonstrated by the fate that this initiative (which was being orchestrated by Senator Rotigliano) would have met: it was enough for Mussolini, immediately informed, to tell President Suardo not to accept it for it to come to nothing. The fourth and final forum was the Grand Council, which since 1929 had been the 'constitutional body of the state' with powers to coordinate all the activities of the regime and which had to be consulted 'on matters of a constitutional nature' Defined by law

The regime's "supreme organ," composed of a few members, might have seemed the most accessible forum, but in practice it was not at all, since it stipulated that its convening and the setting of its agenda were the sole responsibility of the "duce," who was its president and who "convenes it when he deems it necessary."

On the other hand—and the more time passed, the more essential it became to resolve the issue—almost no one had any idea how to actually get out of the situation. As far as the Allies were concerned, rather than ideas, there were only more or less optimistic hypotheses and hopes based on practically nothing or, rather, on a substantial misunderstanding of the ideological character that the war had taken on for them and, therefore, on an equally substantial underestimation of the weight that the Casablanca declaration on unconditional surrender would have had on a request to negotiate a separate peace with Italy or even a "normal" armistice, and on the conviction that the Holy See was the best intermediary for initiating the relevant contacts. As far as the Germans were concerned, the lack of ideas and points of reference was even greater. This led to a general indecision about what to do, aggravated by the fact that many had no intention of resigning themselves to the total liquidation of fascism, especially as regards the corporative structure and wanted to play for time and, at

therefore, a lasting "trust" in Mussolini, as the only one who, with his political skill, could have solved the *puzzle*, explained the ^{situation} to Germany, convinced Hitler to accept Italy's disengagement, and thus find a way to deal with the Allies.

Given this general lack of ideas and indecision, the only one who had clear ideas was Grandi, who had no illusions about Mussolini's ability to convince Hitler to allow Italy to withdraw from the war, nor about the Allies' favorable disposition toward an Italy that had broken away from Germany, much less an Italy ruled by Mussolini. so he was convinced that the only thing to do was to present them with a fait accompli of Italy's change of sides and, once that was done, to rely on Churchill's political realism, namely London's interest in defending its imperial interests in the Mediterranean, which were threatened, as indeed in the rest of the world, by Roosevelt's policy and the potential Soviet threat, and with them the future political, social, and moral order of Europe, over which Churchill felt hung the threat of a postwar period in which the participation of the Soviet armies in the victory over the Axis, the territorial contiguity of the USSR, and the strength the dynamism that this would have ensured for the communist parties dependent on Moscow would have made it even more dramatic and decisive for Europe and for Western civilization than the previous one.

As long as Italy had been the "master" of the Mediterranean, there was peace.

Today, are they compensated by a form of freedom appropriate to the times, just as those limitations correspond to the times? This freedom can be called social freedom; it is the freedom of social categories to rise and rotate on the basis of individual aptitudes, the full and free expression of which is guaranteed. It is unhistorical to compare the advantages and disadvantages of this freedom with political freedom, since these are freedoms inherent in different structures of society. The enjoyment of political freedom can be ensured if it does not limit collective freedoms in the interests of the few; it may be that political freedom will fit into a framework of social freedom in a period to come, the precise features of which we cannot anticipate. For now, however, it is an incidental fruit, which must not distract us from the main objective...

The fundamental difference between democratic regimes and the Italian one is that the former lacked this higher level of politics and stopped at "political" government, not having yet deliberately included the "mass" factor in their ideological system, while in Italy we have sought to grasp the historical needs of the times through a social sensitivity that future historians will have to recognize. The difference in structure between our regime and theirs is secondary or derivative, and should not obscure the essentially representative nature (albeit in a first approximation, which does not claim to be a final solution) of our regime: the *intentionally* representative nature, we might say, of the regime, which is the best guarantee of its instrumental refinement...

Corporatism essentially tends to employ the dynamic element of that pure form of capitalism, from which it has diverged in order to eliminate the fragmentation of supply, and to subject it to a constraint that partly emanates from economic life itself, which the current phase of technical progress and the size of markets make inevitable. In other words, it tends to preserve the control of economic life by economic factors, in contrast to other developments, which instead represent the tampering with economic life by external forces acting outside the social sphere.

For the cultural and political background to this article, see the series of articles by O. L. EFBVRE D'OVIDIO, *L'unità del continente. Che vuol dire "vincere"* (The Unity of the Continent. What Does "Winning" Mean?), *La libertà degli individui* (The Freedom of Individuals) and *La libertà degli Stati* (The Freedom of States), in "Critica fascista," March 1, pp. no sgg., June 1 and

Separation would have been possible; now, having lost Africa and control of the sea, and after Casablanca, "an honorable peace with the Allies"—as he told Victor Emmanuel III on ^{June} 4—was possible for Grandi "only if we have the courage to face the Germans in open battle." Only in this way, he was convinced, would it be possible to "render ineffective the unconditional surrender" that the Allies had decided to impose on the Tripartite powers. This was neither more nor less than the same plan that, in a broader context that also encompassed the internal aspects of the operation he proposed, he had outlined in a long diary entry a fortnight earlier:

My plan? It is, I repeat, reckless. Yugoslavia itself set an example in the spring of 1941. The enemy itself suggests it to us. For three years, enemy propaganda has not changed its tone: "We are not enemies of the Italian people, but only of the regime and the fascist dictatorship. We want to free Italy from the fascist dictatorship that oppresses it and restore Italy's lost freedoms." This, of course, is mere war propaganda. Italy fought against the British and threatened the British Empire's dominance in the Mediterranean. The British will never forget this. But we must pretend to believe the speeches of Churchill and Roosevelt and work alone, of our own free will, to surgically detach the dictatorial regime from the nation. This detachment must be our own work and not the inevitable effect of military defeat. It is we who, independently of the enemy, must prove ourselves capable of regaining our lost freedoms. Mussolini, the dictatorship, and fascism must sacrifice themselves and give way to a new ruling class. They must "commit suicide," demonstrating with this sacrifice their love for the nation and performing with this sacrifice the last great service that the nation demands of them at this tragic moment.

How can this happen in practice? Mussolini will never give up his position of command. But the King, as Head of State, is always able to replace his Prime Minister and with him the entire Government. The new Prime Minister must not have been compromised by the fascist regime, must enjoy the full confidence of the army, and present himself to the nation as a new man, without charisma but with undisputed moral authority. I can see only one person who possesses these indispensable qualities: Marshal Caviglia. Caviglia, a personal enemy of Badoglio, is the only one of the great military leaders of the First World War who did not consort with fascism and show servility to the Duce. The British, who fought under his command in the Battle of Vittorio Veneto, esteem and respect him and trust him as a soldier and as a loyal opponent of the dictatorship and the regime. I myself witnessed these feelings of the British towards Caviglia in London. Caviglia, I am sure, would be able to galvanize our demoralized army. Caviglia is the only one who, even in the desperate conditions in which Italy finds itself, could perhaps negotiate an honorable peace with the enemy that would not humiliate Italy, avoiding the unconditional surrender decided by the Anglo-Americans in

Casablanca Conference. The government? It must be composed of new people who are not directly compromised by the dictatorship. An excellent Foreign Minister could be Alberto Pirelli, whom the British and Americans have always viewed with genuine sympathy. Catholics could be invited to participate in the new government, for example De Gasperi, Fulvio Milani, Paolo Cappa, and Gronchi. Then there is the Giolittian Soleri, the democrat Gasparotto, and Paratore. All of them are anti-fascists, but certainly patriots. None of us who were ministers under Mussolini and members of the Grand Council should be part of the new government, but some supporters who were never part of previous fascist governments should be: the gold medalist Paolucci, Aldo Rossini, and the disabled Carlo Del Croix. The new government should present itself to Parliament on the day of its formation. Parliament should immediately approve the following laws: 1) Abolition of the law establishing the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations and automatic restoration of the Chamber of Deputies as enshrined in the Statute of the Kingdom; 2) Abolition of the unjust racial laws; 3) Abolition of the Special Court for State Security. The 500 national councilors representing trade unions should remain in office provisionally as deputies pending the dissolution of the Chamber by the Head of State. The 200 national councilors appointed as such because they are federal secretaries of the provinces or because they hold positions in the Fascist Party should be considered as having no parliamentary mandate. As President of the Chamber, I am mathematically certain that the 500 national councilors would vote confidence in the new government, which would thus be vested with the confidence of Parliament: this would avoid any interruption in what I call constitutional legitimacy, which the king and all of us are so keen to maintain and preserve. At the same time, the King would issue a proclamation to the nation inviting all Italians to form a sacred union, above all divisions and parties, fascists and anti-fascists, to face the mortal danger threatening the homeland. The standard-bearer of this sacred union could be the venerable Vittorio Emanuele Orlando who, back in 1917, as Prime Minister, rallied all Italians, of all political persuasions, including socialists, to resist the enemy on the Piave and Monte Grappa.

War? I have already said that a statesman must be cautious in good fortune but reckless in adversity. To think of emerging from this ruinous war without a holocaust, without going through an ordeal of mortal sacrifices, is simply absurd. If we want to regain our freedoms, we must show the Anglo-Americans that we are ready to pay the price, without waiting for freedom to be handed to us on a plate by defeat. That would be a freedom paid for at a high price. So what? So it is necessary, indispensable, inevitable that we take the initiative in the war against Nazi Germany, against our powerful and domineering ally. Italian soldiers hate the German soldiers who dragged the nation into the fascist war. The smallest incident between Italian and Nazi troops could act as a detonator and trigger a general explosion. There are 30-35 of our divisions in Italy against 4-5 German divisions. Then there is the people, who have inherited a centuries-old, if not millennial, hatred of the German invader. Sicilian Vespers? Italian Vespers. We must not ask anything of the Anglo-Americans, but only make them suddenly face the spectacle of an Italy defending itself with arms in hand against what will be the inevitable revenge of Nazi Germany. How can the Allies continue?

to fight against a nation that has already taken up arms against the common enemy, led by its king, around whom all Italians will rally? I see no other way out but this. Italy will have to endure a new and perhaps more painful Calvary. This will be the price of its redemption. Even Mussolini will understand in the end. The oath written on the membership card of all of us fascists is conditional—it always has been, from our oath as soldiers to the King, to the same oath that Mussolini, as Prime Minister, swore to the Sovereign. This plan is conditioned, as I have already written, by three assumptions: the courage of the Monarchy; the intelligence of the Allies; the patriotism of the anti-fascists. Will these assumptions and conditions be verified? I do not know. But I hope so.

From a "military" point of view, that is, the possibility that, in the state of discouragement and fatigue that now characterized a large part of the troops and even more so the officers, and after two years or more of war fought alongside the Germans, the army could carry out a reversal of the front, the Grandi plan was, in our opinion and as we have already said, unrealistic. Where it did not lack realism, however, was in terms of "political." While many in England and the United States wanted to adhere strictly to the principle of unconditional surrender, it is a fact that—faced with Italy taking up arms (albeit with only part of its forces and for a short time) against Germany—especially in the United States, where there was a large Italian-American community, the "redemption" would have been strongly felt and would probably have influenced the government's attitude, especially if it had to take into account the practical considerations of the military leaders *on the ground*, starting with Eisenhower (his attitude in the days immediately following July 25 is significant in this regard⁹), who saw the problem primarily in essentially military terms, and the political considerations of those, Churchill at the forefront, who considered the application of the principle of unconditional surrender to Italy to be susceptible to a certain degree of flexibility if it brought concrete political and military advantages to the Allied cause and, as far as Churchill was concerned, to British interests. Revealing in terms of the "political" profile of Grandi's plan is what Churchill reportedly said to Grandi himself in 1950 when the latter informed him of it:

Your plan to cancel the conditions of unconditional surrender established in January 1943 in Casablanca, placing Italy at war with Germany, was a reckless plan, but the only one possible in the circumstances in which Italy found itself.

could be tempted. It would have put us Allies in a serious predicament, because it is clear that we could not have continued to consider a country that was fighting against our common enemy as an enemy...

Apart from Grandi, none of the other members of the fascist "opposition"—not even Ciano, who was the one who, in words, claimed to be the most convinced and the most ready for anything—had a plan or truly realized that the first price to pay for getting out of the conflict would be to set aside fascism and openly oppose Mussolini. This led to a general floundering, which took the form of a series of meetings between various leaders and some of the more prominent or restless military figures and a few men close to the court, who also did not know what to do or were trying to further their own interests, and which had the sole effect of poisoning the atmosphere in Rome and Roman atmosphere in particular with a flood of rumors and indiscretions, to make the sovereign increasingly secretive, doubtful, and cautious, to irritate Mussolini, to add fuel to the fire of intentions or, rather, the Jacobin ambitions of intransigence and, above all, to give new arguments to the mistrust and suspicions of the Germans and to push them to consider their intervention increasingly necessary and urgent in order to put a drastic end to a situation that could precipitate completely from one day to the next and leave them militarily and politically exposed. On closer inspection, even those who kept their nerves and tried to do something concrete ended up acting not according to a more or less precise plan, but driven by a sense of moral responsibility that was essentially personal or by a more or less frantic, albeit sincere and felt as a patriotic duty, search for a way out that, however, they had no idea what it might be, so that their search proceeded essentially by trial and error.

A typical example of the former was Vittorio Cini, who, in February, had accepted (after, as has been said, trying to avoid it) the appointment as minister partly because of Mussolini's insistence and partly because of his "sense of discipline and duty to the country" at such a ^{serious} time. Having taken over the Communications Ministry, one of the most important ministries at the time due to its responsibilities, he quickly realized the extreme gravity of the situation and the impossibility of dealing with it, both because of the scarcity of available resources and because of the insurmountable difficulties in making effective and timely changes to the programs.

and management methods that made it even more serious than it objectively was in certain cases. Convinced of this, after the failure of the Klessheim conference and the last hopes for concrete German help placed in it, Cini became a staunch supporter of the necessity and urgency of a separate peace, without, however, even he, who had a whole series of connections that others did not have in Italy, in the Vatican, and abroad, being able to figure out how to achieve it, much less draw up any plan of action that, as usual, did not have either the sovereign or Mussolini as its point of reference. So, in practice, his action (if we want to call it that, because, in our opinion, it was really just a stance, and probably even less clear-cut than was later claimed, dictated by his strong moral sense) was limited to proposing, on June 19 in the Council of Ministers, an "objective examination of the situation" and the various hypotheses on how to deal with it, none excluded, even that of making peace and - Mussolini having dropped *Vavance*, despite the support given to it by De Marsico and, in a certain sense, also by Oreste Bonomi, defining their speeches as "academic manifestations" - sending, as we have already said, a letter to the "Duce" resigning from the government

In the second sense, the most typical case was that of Bastianini. Thanks to the position he had been called upon to occupy and his ongoing relations with Mussolini and Ambrosio, the undersecretary for foreign affairs immediately realized the gravity of the situation and quickly became convinced that the only thing to do was to try to get out of it with a separate peace. Less brilliant than Ciano, Bastianini had the advantage of not sharing either the cynical catastrophism that had characterized and paralyzed the last months of his predecessor's administration or the resentment and contempt towards Mussolini, to whom, on the contrary, he felt deeply attached and understood his state of mind and inner drama like few others. So he understood that in order to induce him to act in the desired manner, it was necessary not to take him 'head on', but to support his hatred of the Germans and his decision to 'return to politics' and engage in a continuous effort of persuasion, showing him in practice the impracticability of certain paths and certain hypothetical and instrumental ways out (such as inducing Franco to enter the war or, at least, to allow an Axis expeditionary force to cross Spain, which would have taken Gibraltar from behind and blocked access to the Mediterranean) and the need instead to set aside a whole

¹ The Allied landing in French North Africa initially caused considerable nervousness and concern in Madrid, where it was believed that the action could extend to Spanish Morocco and, perhaps, to the Balearic Islands. This fear had led Franco to authorize his military ministers to order a partial mobilization to defend Spain's neutrality, but also to let the governments in Berlin and Rome know that, while they could always "count on the loyalty and friendship of Spain, which will not change its attitude towards the Axis," he was sure that they too agreed with him that "it is in the common interest of the Axis and Spain" for Spain to remain "for now" out of the war, especially since its army was lacking "the modern equipment that had been insistently requested from the Germans since before the start of the war." This statement must have made Mussolini (who, as we said at the beginning of the third chapter, no longer expected "anything good" from Spain and was convinced that, ultimately, the Falange and the government were more pro-British than pro-Axis) think that it was neither possible nor appropriate to take advantage of the moment to try to get Spain to enter the war. Both with Göring on December 6 and ten days later, in his instructions to Ciano as he left to meet with Hitler, he therefore limited himself to suggesting that the Germans supply Spain "gradually" with weapons, but not to urge it to intervene, unless its colonies were attacked. Nor did Hitler, in his talks with Ciano on December 18, show any intention of putting pressure on Madrid or of being willing to supply it with weapons, which, he said, he preferred to give "to those who were actually fighting." Thus, on February 14 and April 2, Mussolini, writing to Franco on the occasion of the arrival in Rome of the new Spanish ambassador, R. M. Cuesta, and the Italian ambassador to Madrid, Paulucci di Calboli, made no mention of intervention in Spain in the conflict.

Mussolini deviated from this line of conduct only on the occasion of the Klessheim conference. However, we do not consider the interpretation of those historians, including Deakin, to be entirely accurate. Based on what he wrote to Hitler on March 9 (as we have seen), they believed that he attached great importance to Spanish intervention or military action by the Axis against Gibraltar via Spain.

Given the progress of operations in Tunisia, it is obvious that the idea appealed to him; however, to say that he attributed decisive importance to it from a military point of view is too simplistic. Apart from the fact that too many elements suggest that it was not his idea, but that he had adopted it under the influence of Ambrosio, Kesselring, and Dönitz, the key to the question lies not so much in the military sphere as in the political sphere, and not so much in relations with Spain as in those with Germany, particularly the efforts of the Duce to convince Hitler to revise his basic strategy and Mediterraneanize the war. It is clear that an action against Gibraltar (which, in theory, should have been well received by Hitler, given the importance he attached to the influence of maritime trade and communications on the course of the war, and was particularly well received by the Japanese, who, in fact, advocated it both in Berlin and Rome, pointing out

a series of hopes, scruples, and fears in contrast, precisely, with the extreme gravity of the threat looming over Italy. Although Bastianini was aware of the gravity of the situation, for a certain period at least, roughly until the occupation of Pantelleria, he did not completely rule out the possibility that there was still some room for maneuver to get out of the conflict without irreparable damage, provided that, without rushing into extreme decisions, no time was wasted, all the necessary steps were taken and, above all, the firmest possible stance was adopted towards Germany, without getting involved, as in the past, in declarations and initiatives from which it could be inferred

that Gibraltar was "a literally vital point" for the enemy) would have been a first major step in this direction. With this in mind, Mussolini, as already mentioned, wrote to Hitler on March 9, limiting himself to a vague reference to the possibility of attacking the Anglo-Americans from behind via Spain; on the 26th, he returned to the issue much more explicitly, linking it indirectly to the situation on the Russian front. The minutes of the Klessheim conference are silent on the subject of Spain. However, the issue is mentioned in the summary memorandum of the talks with the German military leaders presented to Mussolini by Ambrosio (who had advocated action on Gibraltar even in the days leading up to the conference) on April 12 and, more extensively, in L. Pietromarchi's diary, which reads: "During the talks, there was much talk about Spain. The Duce had written secretly to the Führer about fifteen days ago, proposing a diversion in the Iberian Peninsula that would threaten Gibraltar, hinder the passage of convoys in the Mediterranean, force the Allies to divert forces to Morocco, and perhaps prevent the threatened landing in Italy. The Führer had not replied to the letter nor had he alluded to it in the first meeting on Wednesday evening. Instead, he spoke to him about it yesterday as a proposal worthy of further consideration. Indeed, precisely in order to give it careful consideration, Hitler suggested postponing the departure. This sudden conversion of the Führer in favor of the Spanish enterprise left us somewhat skeptical. Why had he not mentioned it to the Duce on the first day? We therefore suspected that this move was intended to flatter the Duce's self-esteem, only to conclude, after more mature consideration, that nothing could be done about it. It immediately became clear that Spain could not fail to view the venture with aversion. It would have cost it the loss of all its colonial possessions without any hope of compensation. It was therefore necessary to present a kind of ultimatum at the Spanish border, backed by the presence of some thirty divisions. All this seemed chimerical.

In practice, the Spanish project died here. In Klessheim, the decision was made that Mussolini (at first there was also talk of Hitler, but then the Germans preferred to *delegate* the entire operation to the "Duce") and instead, unbeknownst to Italy, seek to negotiate an agreement with Franco that would commit him to resisting a possible Allied attack) would try to meet with the caudillo and discuss the problem with him. And, in fact, as soon as he returned to Rome, Mussolini had Bastianini instruct Paulucci to explore the possibility of a meeting with Franco "rather soon." A few days later, Foreign Minister Jordana's statements about Spain's attitude of neutrality "above passions" and "without preference for one side over the other," Madrid's propensity for a "just and fraternal" peace, and the way Franco in turn dropped Paulucci di Calboli's inquiry (pretending to understand it as a personal initiative of the ambassador) led Mussolini to make no further attempts on Madrid and to abandon the Spanish project, which, apart from any other consideration, after the failure of the efforts made in Klessheim to convince Hitler to rethink his entire political-military strategy, must have been much less important to him by then. Indirect but decisive confirmation of this seems to us to be the fact that on May 5, during a meeting with Deputy Chief of Staff Francesco Rossi and Kesselring, he referred to it in the past tense, as something now essentially outdated, limiting himself polemically to contrasting the "initiative" against Gibraltar with that "on the Russian front."

the impression that the two countries shared the same ideas and goals and, on the contrary, exploited every opportunity to play an independent role with respect to their ally.

Bastianini immediately moved forward along these lines with great consistency and skill, achieving good results, especially with regard to Mussolini, but—and this is the point—without managing to give his dynamism and the various initiatives he was involved in a perspective other than that of waiting to see where they might lead and what might come of them for Italy. Ultimately, he too lacked both the awareness that, at that point, political maneuvers, even if skillful and well-constructed, were now useless, and the intellectual—and, why not, moral—courage to think of completely different solutions, risky if you will, but such that, if they had been implemented, they would have truly constituted *the solution* to the Italian drama. In other words, he too lacked a real plan.

As soon as he entered Palazzo Chigi, Bastianini took the initiative to sound out Giovanni Fummi (who, as Lord Cranborne's brother-in-law, a Vatican finance man, and former trustee of Morgan Bank in Italy, had a number of connections with the Anglo-Saxon world) about the possibility of establishing contacts in Switzerland or Spain with the British (in particular with Ambassador Samuel Hoare) and the Americans. And, again with a view to possible contacts with the Allies, he had then appointed Italian representatives in Ankara, Madrid, and Lisbon: Guariglia, Paulucci di Calboli, and Prunas, three of the best diplomats available to Palazzo Chigi and on whom he could rely in case of need. On the other hand, since von Ribbentrop's visit to Rome at the end of February and, above all, as a result of the experience gained after the Klessheim conference in early April, when he had to realize the unreliability of the Germans' "full understanding" and promises, he had tried, with Mussolini's consent and Ambrosio's help on military and political-military issues (*primarily* those relating to the occupation zone in Yugoslavia and the attitude towards Mihajlovic's Chetniks), to give a new character to relations with Germany: more firm, in some cases even polemical, attentive to the echoes and repercussions that Italy's position could have in other countries and among enemy, neutral, and Tripartite governments, and, after years of more or less passive acceptance of Berlin's initiatives and substantial non-interference in their implementation by the Germans, even proactive. This explains Bastianini's efforts to give the 'New Order' a

positive image and program—the "Continental Charter," which we already discussed in Chapter 3—and to try to make the Germans understand how much their short-sighted policy toward the occupied countries and the repressive and exploitative systems adopted in them contributed to fueling hostility and opposition to the Axis and sympathy for its adversaries. And, again, the resistance and expedients put in place by the Foreign Ministry, in agreement with the Supreme Command, to German requests to hand over Jews from Italian-occupied areas or who had taken refuge there, and the maneuvers sometimes carried out to bring them to safety. This also explains the care taken in relations with Japan and the insistence with which Rome sought, as we have seen, to raise the issue of Arab independence until the very end and to induce Berlin, if not to publish an official tripartite declaration on the matter, at least to allow the exchange of letters from the previous year between the Italian and German governments and the Mufti and el Gaylani to be made public., at least to allow the exchange of letters from the previous year between the Italian and German governments and the Mufti and el Gaylani to be made public. These two aspects of Palazzo Chigi's action, considering the moment, could confirm the judgment of those who dismissed this action *outright*, judging it completely unrealistic and eloquent proof of the general disarray in which the Fascist leadership found itself, while

- on the contrary - both were closely linked to what Mussolini considered to be the real solution to focus on and on which Palazzo Chigi, therefore, had to concentrate all its initiatives and efforts: the reversal of the political-military strategy of the war to the advantage of the Mediterranean front over the Russian one. Seen from this perspective, the care taken in relations - direct and indirect, as in the case of policy towards the Arabs, on which Tokyo agreed much more with Rome than with Berlin - with Japan, which was now increasingly critical and concerned about Germany's obstinacy in favoring the entire Eastern Front over the Mediterranean Front (to the point of "revolting" its representation in Rome, sending an ambassador of considerable preparation, political intelligence, and intellectual finesse such as Hidaka, compared to that in Berlin)¹ and which Mussolini considered extreme

extremely important for the role that Tokyo could play both in convincing Hitler to change strategy and as a possible intermediary between Berlin and Moscow, it takes on a logic and meaning that are very different from those too often simplistically attributed to it. This is true even though there are many elements that lead us to believe that, unlike Mussolini, after the Klessheim conference Bastianini had to set aside the Russian card and—while keeping it in his deck—focus increasingly on that of a separate peace. However, without any precise ideas or a plan of his own for achieving this, he limited himself in practice to keeping abreast of developments in the international situation and, above all, hoping that the difficulties into which the reversal of the war in the East was plunging Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and even Turkey would open up a space for Italian diplomatic action that would allow him to exert energetic pressure on Germany, either on behalf of Bucharest, Budapest, and Sofia to exert strong pressure on Germany to accept the idea of a compromise peace or—if Berlin refused—to negotiate with the Allies, and in particular with England (considered the most interested in containing future expansion of Soviet hegemony in southeastern Europe and the Mediterranean), a disengagement from Germany and a bloc exit from the war by Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Italy itself, which in both cases would have had to act as a point of reference for the other three countries and as the main interlocutor with both Germany and the Allies.

An operation of this kind was neither easy nor risk-free; while the greatest obstacle was the close attention with which Germany followed all the moves of its allies, the recurring conflicts between Hungary and Romania over Transylvania, the Bulgarians' strong sense of belonging to the Slavic world and their distrust of Italian "pro-Serbianism," as well as Mussolini's distrust of Turkey, which, especially in the early stages, played a significant role in the whole affair. After Stalingrad

ti" (see DDI, s. IX, X, pp. 79, 106, 447). This step was immediately followed by the surrender of Pantelleria and another in Rome by the military attaché, General Shimizu, and Admiral Abe, who presented Ambrosio with a document ("Assessment of the Situation") summarizing the Japanese point of view on the general progress of the war in Europe and the situation in the Mediterranean in particular, which was discussed on June 25 at Palazzo Venezia with Mussolini (to whom Shimizu, confirming the importance that Tokyo now attributed to relations with Rome, announced on this occasion the "Japanese intention to send a high-ranking personality to Italy"), reaching a substantial uniformity of assessment, especially with regard to what were thought to be the enemy's next actions against Italy. Among other things, it emphasized the "interdependence" between operations on the Eastern Front and those in the Mediterranean and the "substantial and moral" importance for the Axis of "crushing the attempted landing" that the Allies would certainly have made in Sicily or Sardinia (see AUSSME, *Historical Diary of the Supreme Command, June 1943, Attachments (sub date)*, June 25, 1943). In the Appendix, Document No. 7b, the "Assessment of the Situation" and the minutes of the June 25 meeting at Palazzo Venezia are reproduced.

Ankara's fear was that the Soviets (who, at the end of 1941, in order to avert the danger of Turkey aligning itself with the Axis, had said they were prepared to guarantee Turkey possession of the Dodecanese, Bulgarian Thrace, and part of northern Syria) would advance into Europe and especially into the Balkans close to European Turkey and put pressure on it to gain access to the Mediterranean and recover the territories lost after the revolution in Asia. Hence, initially, the Turks' interest (manifested in early March 1943 in the form of an informal and secret proposal to some of the countries concerned) in promoting the establishment of a sort of anti-Bolshevik Balkan federation comprising Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and, in the future, Serbia and Greece, to which, at least initially, they must have thought that the British would not be entirely hostile. Then, realizing the unfeasibility of the project and encouraged by the proliferation of rumors and reports of increasingly insistent attempts by Budapest and especially Bucharest to sound out the possibilities of initiating negotiations with the Western Allies - they fell back on a withdrawal from the war by Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Italy, which was to be the reference point and decisive element of the operation, so as to try to prevent the Soviets from filling the "void" that would sooner or later be opened on their European borders and in the Black Sea.

However, the interest in involving Italy in the operation was not only on the part of the

Turkey. In Rome, as in those who could *shave off* the interests of the minor vassal nations of Germany, Hungary and, perhaps even more so, Romania had also been under scrutiny since the end of 1942. We say perhaps because we are better informed about the Romanian attitude, given that Italy had Bova Scoppa as its representative in Bucharest, who was a staunch supporter of the collective disengagement operation and, in the meantime, of a sort of Rome-Bucharest-Budapest axis aimed at putting pressure on Berlin while in Budapest it was represented by Anfuso, who, realized that after Stalingrad 'Europe was ripe for peace', but believed less in the operation, feared that it would give rise to further reasons for conflict between Berlin and Rome, and severely judged the lightness with which the Hungarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Kallay moved in his search for contacts and in his surveys in neutral countries.

Since November 1942, Romanians and Hungarians had been trying to cono-

to understand the Italian point of view and agree on a course of action with ^{Rome}. To this end, both Kallay and Romanian Vice President and Foreign Minister Mihail Antonescu had tried to meet with Mussolini or at least with Ciano. With the new year, their requests had become more insistent. Towards the end of January, Admiral Horthy went so far as to tell Anfuso that he had "dreamed in recent months of territorial continuity with Italy," thinking that it "could represent a certain guarantee for us." Bova Scoppa, in turn, had drafted a note for Ciano in mid-January summarizing Antonescu's two main proposals: ascertaining the point of view and "concerns" of the Americans and, above all, the British regarding the threat of Slavization and Russian domination on the continent, and "putting forward some ideas on the organization of Europe that would help to resolve, at least in part, the very serious moral crisis in which it finds itself" Ciano, who until a few days earlier had been very critical of Antonescu, was enthusiastic about it and took it to Mussolini, who dismissed the proposal ("the Danube channel is certainly not the one we should follow"), but, as Ciano noted in his diary, he had shown "no reaction when I said openly that, at a certain point, we too should make some direct contact."

In his search for a solution to get Italy out of the dead end it found itself in, Bastianini, who had just arrived at Palazzo Chigi, began to closely follow the evolution of the positions of Budapest and Bucharest and tried to support their intentions to connect more organically with Rome and, through them, to try to obtain some information to assess the actual intentions of the Anglo-Americans, and especially London, in the face of a possible separate peace proposal. All this, of course, within the limits allowed by the need not to openly clash with Berlin (now increasingly attentive to the discontent of the minor allies and their attempts to establish contacts to break away from Germany) and by the indecision and changeability of Mussolini's attitude, who - completely taken up with his idea that the real solution was to be sought not in this type

of operations, but in a radical revision of Hitler's strategy in the East and of the possibilities for a compromise peace that it would have opened up for the Axis. Although he had full confidence in him and gave him considerable room for maneuver, as far as the "Danube channel" was concerned, if he did not obstruct it, he did not encourage it, much less support it. Hence, on the one hand, his willingness to accept Kallay and Antonescu's requests to meet with Mussolini, but also his continual postponement of the meetings so as not to strain relations with the Germans too much and, on the other hand, his giving more and more space in Italian political action to the discourse on the aims of the war, on the "positive" contents of the "New Order," the future structure of Europe, i.e., those topics to which the minor allies were most sensitive and which could strengthen ties with them, both in terms of a front that was as common as possible with regard to Germany and in the event of a breakaway from it and a separate peace.

In this context, the first visit to Rome by one of the Danubian statesmen, Kallay, could only take place at the beginning of April and came to nothing. Although Anfuso had tried to urge him to encourage Kallay to express his thoughts without too much hesitation, Mussolini remained very vague, ignoring the Hungarian president's invitation to say a "clarifying word" that would give "a political direction to the war" and serve "for large and small countries, whether allied, neutral, or enemy," and essentially limited himself to two statements, indicative of his state of mind, but certainly not enough to make Kallay believe that the "Duce" could actually break the deadlock: that he had "already pointed out [to Hitler] and argued for eliminating, at least as an operational front, the Russian front" and that - being convinced that if it is true "that war is the continuation of a political line by other means" it is "also true that politics is the continuation of war by other means" - he too, like Kallay, had long believed that "political statements on the aims of the Axis were necessary." Thus, Kallay, disappointed by Mussolini's attitude, ended up pouring out his concerns to Cardinal Maglione and inviting the Vatican to "do something," but, given Mussolini's attitude, he was unable to respond to the Secretary of State's request to know if he had any information that, representing "a minimum basis for discussion," might allow the Holy See to take some initiative to intercede with the Anglo-Americans.

For the moment, contrary to what Bova Scoppa and Bastianini himself had hoped, Kallay's visit was not followed by one from Antonescu. This was not only and not so much because Kallay's visit had shown that Mussolini, to use Anfuso's expression, was not yet "mature" enough for it to have any positive effect, but because the Germans, now on their guard, had hastened to rein in their minor allies, calling them one by one to a sort of *redde rationem* with the Führer, and to Bastianini himself, to whom von Ribbentrop and Hitler himself, on April 29, during talks with Lavai in Klessheim, had given a clear stop sign, making him understand how much they disliked Rome indulging in the progressive shift of its minor partners towards the Italian "pole" and their ambitions to start negotiations with the enemy.

The German *approach* led to yet another postponement of Antonescu's trip to Rome, but not to the abandonment of the Danube card. In a certain sense, in fact, it ended up being strengthened to such an extent that it appeared to Palazzo Chigi to be the best option to pursue in the event that, with all others having failed, they found themselves in a position where they had to "decide their own fate without waiting for the continuation of the war to bring Germany to the extreme consequences of defeat." Extremely significant in this regard is a secret memorandum ("Reflections on the developments of the war") submitted to Bastianini on May 12, at the moment when all resistance in Tunisia ceased, by his chief of staff Babuscio Rizzo and immediately forwarded by Bastianini to Mussolini (who found it

"interesting")² to the sovereign. According to the forecasts outlined in the memorandum³, unless it was invaded, Italy had not yet reached the crucial point of having to radically revise its position. As long as there was "a solid and active front in the East, albeit with ups and downs," and Germany's military weakening had not become definitive and such as to threaten internal collapse, all of which could only be verified at the end of the summer campaign and at the moment of facing a new winter of war, Babuscio Rizzo believed it was highly likely that Europe, both in its most hostile part towards Germany and clandestinely linked to the Allies, i.e., the occupied countries, and in the part consisting of Berlin's satellite states, would not move. Hence the possibility and opportunity for Italy to 'wait and see' 'the development of the military situation in the coming months' in the east as well.

at the cost of "every sacrifice." Before the military situation had been clearly defined, not even Budapest and Bucharest, let alone Sofia, would have decided to take effective action, and Italy's interest in

"moment when he deemed it necessary to review his position in the war" was "not to present himself alone with a new solution," but together with Hungary, Romania, and possibly Bulgaria, seeking to capitalize on the "nightmare of Ankara" for "Russian supremacy" and Spain's interest in "politically supporting with all its might" an initiative that "could be of real substance, such as to even determine an adversary's interest, should symptoms of the German structure's collapse arise." In this perspective, for Babuscio Rizzo, "the Balkan longitudinal axis" should not be sacrificed to the Germans, but kept alive, made more solid and, if possible, even defended from them, because "there is no doubt that any change in the two governments brought about by Germany would be contrary to our interests."

How unrealistic this scenario was is so obvious that there is no need to dwell on it; but this does not detract from its interest for those who truly want to understand the character, limitations, contradictions, and at the same time the moral fabric of the action that Palazzo Chigi and Bastianini *in particular* tried to put together in the last two months before the landing in Sicily and, at the same time, because Mussolini, while doing nothing to induce Bastianini to give it up and, indeed, agreeing in the end to meet Antonescu after Kallay, never really placed his trust in the Danube-Balkan solution, which, on the contrary, found more and more supporters, both sincere and opportunistic, as the situation worsened. For some, in fact, supporting it meant working to push Mussolini to adopt it as his own and take some initiative to try to implement it, thus breaking out of the immobility to which his focus on the "elimination" of the Eastern Front had condemned him.

¹ All things considered, this must also have been Bova Scoppa's position. At least, this is what appears from some notes in L. Pietromarchi's diary, in particular one dated June 18, 1943, which reads: "Romania, especially through the efforts of Mihail Antonescu, is agitating for the Duce to conduct some soundings before it is too late. During his recent visit here, Bova Scoppa submitted a report to the undersecretary. In it, he clarified Antonescu's ideas, but it is clear that Renato skillfully attributed his own ideas to the Romanian prime minister. It is said that the war is lost, and the arguments put forward to prove this are superfluous. It is stated that England has an interest in not weakening Europe and not favoring Russian success. There would therefore be points of converging interest to be brought to bear. Mussolini should therefore take the initiative in sounding out the situation, since while Hitler has exclusive rights, the Allies would not reject a move by the Duce out of hand. And this is where the report begins to falter. It is said that today a compromise peace could still be reached, while tomorrow there would be no alternative but unconditional peace. Bova Scoppa therefore insisted that Mihail Antonescu be received by the Duce. The latter agreed and will receive him in great secrecy at the Rocca delle Caminate.

In my opinion, all these maneuvers are destined to fail miserably. Germany will not—

As far as Mussolini is concerned, it is significant that although he eventually gave in to Bastianini's insistence and agreed to meet Antonescu (on July 1 at Rocca delle Caminate) and conversed with him, showing a sympathy and understanding that he had not shown during his meeting with Kallay, he did not make any specific commitments. Giving his *approval* to the meeting, he told Bastianini that he agreed with many of the arguments that, according to Bova Scoppa, Antonescu wanted to put forward, but he also told him clearly that it was "still too early to start diplomatic action": before making a move, Hitler had to be "backed into a corner." "In two months, the situation had to be clarified, because it was foolish of Hitler to insist on doing something impossible, such as destroying all the reserves that a vast country like Russia could throw into the furnace!"¹ And he firmly adhered to this position during his talks with Antonescu.

It is possible, but all things considered unlikely, that the note in which Bastianini summarized what the two said to each other at Rocca delle Caminate omitted some of the more delicate passages of their conversation²; the substance of the

will never agree to a separate peace. It is determined to fight to the bitter end... And therefore it can be assumed that with relentless energy it will crush the maneuvers of its allies to abandon it until the very end.

The truth is that Bastianini, Ciano, Grandi, and a large number of figures in the regime do not want, do not see, and do not hope for any other possibility than a separate peace, and this illusion distorts their view of reality.

Now, at the suggestion of the chief of staff, Babuscio Rizzo, another policy is being woven: to bring together the friendly states of the Danube-Balkan region of Europe ever more closely, to form a bloc around Italy and strengthen, with their accession, an initiative aimed at a compromise peace. An attempt is therefore being made to lure Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria into the illusion that, at the moment of a possible negotiation, general disarray can be avoided. As if, at the moment of peace, everyone would not end up thinking only of themselves, exclusively of themselves and their own interests. These are all futile attempts (in the *Pietromarchi Archive*). The 'report' by Bova Scoppa to which Pietromarchi refers is the one published in *DDI*, pp. 514 ff. On its genesis, see R. BOVA SCOPPA, *Colloqui con due dittatori* cit., pp. 96 ff., from which it appears that, initially conceived in the form of a letter to Mussolini (which Bova Scoppa had Acquaforte read in advance, who showed it to the king, awaiting his full approval and "advice" to present it immediately), it was drafted in its final form after the ambassador in Bucharest had discussed it with Bastianini, who suggested that he transform it into a formal memorandum that could be submitted through the chain of command to Mussolini to persuade him to allow a meeting with Antonescu as soon as possible. On this matter, see also G. BASTIANINI, *Uomini, cose, fatti* cit., p. 113; E. ORTONA, *Il 1943 da Palazzo Chigi* cit., p. 1114 (June 17 and 18, 1943), from which it appears that Mussolini in turn wrote a note (probably for Bastianini) "relating to the journey of the Romanians," of which, however, there is no trace in the documentation preserved in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹ See G. BASTIANINI, *Uomini, cose, fatti* cit., p. 113; R. BOVA SCOPPA, *Colloqui con due dittatori* cit., pp. no sg. According to Bova Scoppa—who, in our opinion, however, controversially exaggerates the meaning of what Mussolini had said to Bastianini—the "Duce" explained the two-month postponement by saying that "in order to negotiate," it was necessary to wait until the military situation was "favorable," that is, according to Bova Scoppa, until Germany achieved success in the East or Italy repelled an Allied attempt to land in Sicily.

² This, incidentally, is the theory hinted at in his diary under the date of July 3 by E. ORTONA, *Il 1943 da Palazzo Chigi* cit., p. 1119: "However, this is the official report. There is certainly more to it than that. From what I have ascertained from the chief of staff, the foundations of a cross-Danubian Balkan axis were laid, not so much as an anti-German force as an extra-German one."

However, the position taken by the "Duce" is clear from this and, ultimately, no different from that recalled by Bastianini in his memoirs fifteen years later. ^{The note} summarized it as follows:

The opinion that war must also be fought with political weapons led him to make a proposal to the Führer, which was shelved two months ago, but which he intends to revive as soon as the military situation has undergone the necessary clarification that is currently underway. Antonescu assures us that he has no intention of abandoning this line, which he inaugurated a few months ago, and that, on the contrary, he believes it should be reaffirmed and clarified at a meeting of the leaders of the Tripartite countries.

Compared to this summary, Bastianini's memoirs introduce two variations: *one*, that the proposal for a "general conference of the Axis" would have been made by Antonescu; *two*, that Mussolini would only have endorsed it, reserving the right to set the date, "not wanting to give the enemy, who was showing signs of wanting to concentrate its forces against Italy in the Mediterranean, the impression of taking such an initiative under the pressure of fear." Both variations are more than acceptable, the first of which could suggest a sequence of events of this type: Antonescu makes his proposal, Mussolini accepts it and makes it his own (reserving the right to set the date) but also extends it to the Japanese. All that is added in Bastianini's memoirs is that the "Duce" not only assured the Romanian foreign minister that "he would make such a proposal to Hitler within two months at the most," but also told him that "if the German leader rejected it, he would proceed without him." Bova Scoppa, in turn, claimed that this last statement had been reported to him after the meeting by Antonescu himself.

From a historical perspective, and especially with regard to understanding Mussolini's position, the most important issue is not this, nor is it the repercussions and echoes of the meeting at Rocca delle Caminate. What matters is understanding the different perspectives.

in which it was placed by the Italian side. If this is understood, then the differences between the various available testimonies can also be largely understood. For Bova Scoppa, the meeting was supposed to serve to finalize the collective withdrawal from the war of Italy, Romania, Hungary, and possibly Bulgaria, and hopefully to secure for Italy more advantageous peace terms than those it would have obtained under the Casablanca Declaration and after the Allies had invaded. The same objective *at that time*, before the landing in Sicily, was also shared by Bastianini, who, however, believed he still had a certain amount of time that he thought he could use to launch a new type of European organization that could be "accepted by the enemy" to end the war and keep Russia in check and which, being sponsored by Italy, would ensure it a special moral and political position. This was all the more so because, in his unreality, the undersecretary for foreign affairs went so far as to think that the European organization he envisioned (and on the road to which Romanian and Hungarian consent should have been a very important first step) could "save the dictators in their internal function." In the days between the meeting at Rocca delle Caminate and the Allied landing in Sicily, Alberto Pirelli, to whom he had explained his position and his hope of "bringing about a meeting of the heads of government of the Tripartite and the smaller European countries" to launch it, summarized Bastianini's plan in his *notebooks*:

It would be a matter of getting everyone to accept the principle that every nation can have the internal regime it believes in, and therefore possibly even a totalitarian regime, provided that these countries agree to renounce certain rights of autonomous action with regard to other countries and indeed renounce part of their sovereignty in favor of the European community.

"And," says Bastianini, "Rousseau's contractual concept applied to the international arena: just as all citizens are equal before the law of their respective countries, even though

And Bastianini: "The League of Nations was wrong to side with and protect a *diktat*. In this case, I see the possibility that there will not even be a peace treaty, but that the new European organization will mature within the continent and be accepted by the enemy."

Mussolini's view was quite different. For him, the meeting between the leaders of the Tripartite countries (which he perhaps hoped Tojo would also attend) was intended to induce Hitler, through a common position, to bring the war in the East to some kind of conclusion (peace or stabilization of the front) and make the Mediterranean the focus of the war in the West. He either did not believe in any other possibilities or did not want to give up on them yet. Hence, even though he felt the water rising to his throat, he was unwilling to commit himself to Antonescu, waiting not so much for his own military success as to learn the outcome of the secret contacts underway between Germany and the USSR and, if these had come to nothing, for the end of the summer to make it clear that it was impossible for the Germans to resolve the operations on the Russian front positively.

Unless we want to delve into a series of personal cases, which are interesting but would add little or nothing to the overall picture and the typology we have tried to outline on the basis of those we consider most emblematic and characteristic of the human and political condition of the fascist elite, the crisis that troubled it, its moods, its lack of ideas on what to do, its illusions, etc., and, in any case, most significant for understanding some of the most important events of the last months of the regime and of July 25 itself, after what we have said, to finish reconstructing the essential elements of the attitude of the fascist leadership in trying to understand how it influenced the behavior of Victor Emmanuel III, there is little left to say.

The Allied landing in Sicily on July 1, although expected (even if, in general, many, even at the highest military levels, did not expect it so soon), hit the Fascist leadership with such disruptive violence that it is easy to understand how confusion and tension within the group rose within a few days - practically from the moment it became clear that the invasion had been completely successful and that it was futile

hope that the enemy could be driven back into ^{the sea} - to the point of reaching the brink of a real crisis. However, its moral fabric was now so deteriorated that even in this situation it was unable to express itself or materialize. And if anyone in Rome thought of a solution, it was not the moderates, who were completely in disarray, but Farinacci and Scorza, who were on two different but converging paths, for whom the only solution was or was becoming Fesautoramento, the embalming of Mussolini and the assumption of effective power by the PNF; for the former, in his own more coherent way and already projected into the supranational and ideological logic of the Nazi New Order, to finally achieve total "collaboration" with the Germans; for the latter - as we have seen - to make the party the fulcrum, the engine of the resistance.

Cianetti's memoirs, in their simplicity, clearly convey the state of prostration, confusion, and incipient self-criticism that nevertheless failed to mature, to free itself from myths, from hopes that were no longer even admitted, from the inability to choose a path and follow it, and, therefore, from ultimately returning with every thought and state of mind to Mussolini, to the increasingly frustrating wait for his decisions. Even the most controlled sources, which are less spontaneously elementary, offer the same picture. All of them also agree on a very significant aspect of this picture: from July 13, from the moment it became clear that the landing had been completely successful, the questions that everyone was asking themselves ("What does Mussolini say?", "What is the Boss doing?", "Why isn't the Duce saying anything, doing anything?", "What should we do?") translated into agitation, a series of meetings that were as feverish as they were disorderly and, for most, essentially without prospects.

The first of these meetings took place on July 13 at the party headquarters, near Scorza.

At the time of the landing, the secretary of the PNF had been among the optimists, flaunting his confidence in a swift victory over the invaders. The day before, he had handed Mussolini a note stating that the Italian people had reacted to the news of the landing with "enthusiastic

pride and dignity," as demonstrated by the "spontaneous demonstrations" that, according to him, had marked the evening of the 10th and the day of the 11th. He also arranged for the "mobilization" of fascist "forces" in all regional capitals over the following days, appointing speakers—including several members of the government and the Grand Council, as well as various prominent party figures—who would take the floor on that occasion and incite the people to fight and resist. By the 13th, however, his optimism had already faded and, according to Bastianini, his standing with Mussolini was declining (on the 17th, the "Duce" would say that in little more than two months "his secretariat has brought me speeches, an address, a *pronouncement*"), so it is not entirely unreasonable to assume that he was already thinking of cautiously distancing himself from the "Duce" and essentially acting on his own.

In addition to Scorza, Albini, Bastianini, Bottai, and Chierici were apparently present at the meeting. In the "stunned" silence of Bottai and the "monk-like" silence of Scorza, Bastianini and Chierici put forward the idea that it was necessary to "go to the Chief, begging him to step aside (above or beside the government, it is not clear) and let a responsible government, with its three military ministers to be appointed and the others to be confirmed or changed, govern." Ortona's diary⁴ shows that Bastianini actually thought he could achieve the abolition of the party and an appeal to the sovereign in this way. However, behind his "bonze-like" silence, it was Scorza who was trying to steer the general unrest, and with completely different prospects. Ortona's diary⁵ also suggests that, as early as July 14, the party secretary had in mind and was preparing the "pronouncement" two days later at Palazzo Venezia (and the related request to Mussolini to convene the Grand Council), which would not, therefore, have arisen from the proposal, perhaps by Giuriati, put forward during the heated and confused meeting of the mat-

on July 16 at Scorza's house, as is generally believed¹, but rather by a premeditated action (in which Scorza must have been supported by Bottai, which proves the confusion that characterized the moment²) that even provided for a different, more authoritative, and more "secure" composition of the group of leaders who were to go to Mussolini. This latter point is confirmed by two references by Bottai in his diary: where, speaking of the two meetings at Scorza's house, the one in the morning and the one in the afternoon before going to Palazzo Venezia, he writes that the party secretary had obtained Mussolini's agreement to receive "the men charged with delivering the already postponed reports" (those arranged by Scorza on July 12, during which the major leaders were supposed to speak, but which some of them, particularly Grandi, had in the meantime refused to hold), and therefore also minor figures, "while in the morning it had been decided to summon others as well," including Giunta, Rossoni, Ricci, and Bonomi. And that the political initiative was in the hands of Scorza and Farinacci and not of the moderates, and that the latter essentially lacked both clear ideas and cohesion.

¹ On the two meetings at the PNF headquarters and the visit to Mussolini on the evening of the same day, see G. ACERBO, *Fra due plotoni di esecuzione* cit., pp. 491 ff.; G. BOTTAI, *Diario* cit., pp. 392 ff.; T. CIANETTI, *Memorie dal carcere di Verona* cit., pp. 394 ff.; G. GIURIATI, *La parabola di Mussolini* cit., pp. 219 ff.; c. SCORZA, *Mussolini tradito* cit., pp. 173 ff.; as well as MUSSOLINI, XXXIV, p. 340.

² On the night between July 13 and 14, G. BOTTAI, *Diary* cited above, pp. 389 ff., based on what had been said at the first meeting at Scorza's, summarized in two hypotheses the possible developments that, in his opinion, the situation could have taken:

"A government situation with Mussolini still means a situation entirely in the hands of fascism (Party and ideology). If this is the situation (it is not believed to be), it is nevertheless necessary for Mussolini to adapt, within limits but also with the speed that the hour allows and demands, to the functions of Head of Government in accordance with the rules of the fascist constitution; to adopt the following measures:

- appointment of military ministers;
- effective functioning of the Head of State] M. [Major] (I do not express any judgment on individuals, as this is an area in which I cannot responsibly do so);
- steering of propaganda, to make it more effective and at the same time more flexible, detached from partisan rhetoric (instrument of the Minister?);
- active (not merely passive) responsibility of ministers and functioning of their Council with a frequency appropriate to the circumstances;
- convening of the Grand Council;
- proclamation by the King to the country, followed by a manifesto by the Duce (and the Grand Council?)

A government without Mussolini means a situation that is already considered untenable, either in part or in whole, in the hands of Fascism (the Party and the ideology). Now is not the time to distinguish between Mussolinism and Fascism, setting the former aside (albeit at a higher level) to bring the latter to the fore: it would be too late. If we were at this point (and only those who now hold the powers and instruments of government can give a responsible answer), it would no longer be a question of detaching Mussolini from Fascism and from the country, but of us, who are Fascists and therefore embody Fascism with him, detaching ourselves from the country; but the situation, in this case, would become the typical competence of the Crown. It would be up to the Crown to decide on the type of government: military? Military-civilian? Military-civilian with only non-fascist civilians, or with both?

These are the two alternatives. The other, Mussolini above or alongside a government of which he is not a part, would only be an intermediate solution: and this is a time for extreme decisions, not intermediate ones.

If, in these considerations, we disregard the fact of war, it is because it is clear that they are fundamentally and ultimately

The confused and disjointed course of action taken against Mussolini on the evening of July 16, and even more so what happened in the days immediately following, prove this. At Palazzo Venezia, faced with a Mussolini who appeared submissive but was in fact irritated and aware of who actually posed the greatest danger to him, so much so that he immediately gave the floor to

¹ Interesting information (also relating to the atmosphere surrounding the machinations of the Fascist leadership in those days) and opinions on the meeting of July 16 and the move against Mussolini by the leaders on the evening of the same day are reported by L. PIETROMARCHI, *Diary*, July 16, 17, and 18, 1943 (in *the Pietromarchi Archive*).

to Farinacci, the moderates could do nothing but agree with Farinacci's request to convene the Grand Council, which was ultimately granted by Mussolini. As for the rest, their speeches, especially the two most challenging ones by Giuriati and Bottai, were completely lacking in bite and real substance, consisting of "constitutional" discussions on the crisis of fascism, its distant precedents, its causes, all things that, at that moment, were of little consequence and contained no indications, even hypothetical ones, for truly fundamental decisions.

Nor, on closer inspection, could they contain them, given that even the moderates present at the meetings of those days could not conceive of the idea that, at that point, there were only two alternatives: Farinacci's idea of keeping fascism alive at all costs by relying completely on Germany, and that of recognizing failure and defeat and, therefore, "passing the baton." To think, as they thought and wanted, of saving fascism by bringing it back to the "right path" from which it had deviated in the last decade and to its "genuine contents" was an absurdity that shows how they had lost all sense of reality and were groping in the dark. Everyone, even the most intellectually gifted and "critical." What Bottai said three years later, reflecting on the events of July 1943, applies to all of them.

"You ask me for Ambrosio's head. But he had the courage to tell me more truths than any of you gathered here have ever told me. Ambrosio is an honest man, he is not a genius but he is honest."

Farinacci was indignant at Grandi's absence. He said that he should be expelled from the Party. As if this were not the most welcome thing for Grandi in these circumstances.

The truth is that the meeting was dominated by fear. Each of the attendees expected that at any moment the door of the room would open and they would be arrested. The language used with the Duce was the most humble. No conclusion.

For the text of Roosevelt and Churchill's "message to the Italian people," broadcast by Radio Algiers on July 16, see W. CHURCHILL, *The Second World War, Vol. V: The Noose Tightens*, 2, pp. 60 ff. In the first part, the message reiterated Churchill's accusation that Mussolini was solely responsible for Italy's intervention and subjugation to Germany and - after stating that the Italians had fought bravely on all battlefields but had been betrayed and abandoned by the Germans, who now had no hope of victory - it menacingly boasted of the Anglo-Americans' domination of the Italian skies. In the second part, it stated:

"Italy's only hope for survival lies in an honorable surrender to the overwhelming power of the United Nations military forces. If you continue to tolerate the fascist regime, subservient to the evil power of the Nazis, you will suffer the consequences of your own choice. We derive no satisfaction from invading Italian soil and bringing the tragic devastation of war to the Italian people, but we are determined to destroy the false leaders and their doctrines that have brought Italy to its present condition. Every moment of your resistance to the combined forces of the United Nations—every drop of blood you sacrifice—can serve only one purpose: to give the fascist and Nazi leaders a little more time to escape the inevitable consequences of their crimes. All your interests and all your traditions have been betrayed by Germany and your false and corrupt leaders; only by repudiating them can a reconstituted Italy hope to occupy an honored place in the family of European nations.

Now is the time for you, Italian people, to listen to the voice of your own respect, your interests, and your aspiration for a return to national dignity, security, and peace. Now is the time for you to decide whether Italians should die for Mussolini and Hitler, or live for Italy and civilization.

For the article by R. FARINACCI, see *Guardare in faccia la realtà (Facing reality)*, in *Il regime fascista*, July 15, 1943.

¹ See ACS, *Private Secretariat of the Duce, Correspondence ref. (1922-1943)*, *Audiences*, July 16, 1943, the list of leaders who went with Scorza to Mussolini: Acerbo, Bastianini, Biggini, Bottai, Cianetti, De Bono, De Cicco, De Vecchi, Farinacci, Giuriati, and Teruzzi.

He wrote in his diary about those meetings: for him and for the others who had participated with him, they had constituted an "extreme attempt, not to save fascism as it was, but to save it by bringing it back, with drastic remedies, to its genuine essence and ^{constitution}."

In light of the speeches made on the evening of July 16 on the occasion of Mussolini's death and, more generally, the climate in which this had developed, many subsequent events can be understood.

On the one hand, it is understandable how Farinacci (and also Buffarini Guidi, who, however, acted ^{independently}) increasingly leaned toward a solution to the crisis that would hinge on the Germans and stabilize the political situation by decapitating the military leadership on which the king could base an initiative to oust Mussolini from the government and liquidate the ^{regime}. Significant in this regard is a long report by von Mackensen to von Ribbentrop dated July 22, informing him of a conversation he had had the day before with Farinacci (who had requested the meeting and had arrived in the company of Marshal Cavallero). According to the German ambassador, Farinacci had informed him of the meeting on the 16th and the subsequent meeting with Mussolini, during which the "Duce" had accepted Farinacci's request to convene the Grand Council.

The Grand Council has nothing to do with it. Everything was done by him. Nothing will come of it. The Academy will be turned into... I am discouraged; I would prefer anything to this Grand Council. As long as Mussolini is around, nothing truly useful will be done for this poor Italy [...]. I think that tomorrow's Grand Council will end up like all the others. No one is ready to launch such an attack.

Finally, thirdly, the actions of the moderates on July 16 and their subsequent behavior make it clear that, if the meeting of the Grand Council unfolded and ended as it did, it was due, on July 21, to the entry into the group and decisive leadership of Dino Grandi, a man who could be described as anything but lacking in clear ideas and decisiveness, and who possessed the necessary ruthlessness to bring together and unite a group of largely disheartened individuals, who were heterogeneous in character, in their awareness of the gravity of the moment and the concrete possibilities for maneuvering that existed, and in their attitude toward Mussolini, such as those who would have to face the battle in the Grand Council on the evening of the 24th.

Without Grandi's intervention, things would probably have taken a different course. And in saying this, we are not referring only to developments in the fascist camp. On the 21st, after the failure of the meeting between Hitler and Mussolini in Feltre and the first major bombing of Rome, the fascist leadership was in complete disarray; prey to the most diverse and conflicting moods, with each passing day it was increasingly turning into a frenzied and mephitic liquid of culture in which the most disparate and absurd proposals and projects were born and died immediately afterwards. To use Pietromarchi's apt image, "a yeast of conspiracy" was in the air, but no one had any idea what to do, and everything ended up in more or less secret meetings and consultations, during which fantasies and fears ran wild in imagining the most unrealistic solutions and political combinations.

This morning, Luca Pietromarchi noted, a harsh statement was released regarding the meeting between the Duce and the Führer. The impression was universally negative. Thus ends the great solidarity between the two countries. The talks took place in Feltre. They may be the last between representatives of the two regimes. General Ambrosio apparently told the Duce that the nation could collapse in a fortnight. Everyone is expecting a landing that will bring British troops to Bologna. The decisive battle will be fought on the Po. These are the impressions.

Meanwhile, there is a hint of conspiracy in the air. What the leaders would like is a

government headed by Orlando, which could include all the most notorious figures, from Farinacci to Scorza, Grandi, and Bottai. It would have to prepare for the "breakaway." But apart from the fact that Orlando would never agree to embark with men he had always opposed, such an attempt would be the most despicable imaginable: it would serve only to throw the Duce overboard, to place all the responsibility on him and save the crew. The idea is so grotesque that it is hard to believe it could have been considered. Conspiracies are afoot everywhere. There is talk of nighttime meetings at Marshal Badoglio's house with De Bono and the Duke of Aosta. There is talk of maneuvers between Cavallero and Farinacci.

In 1939 and early 1940, as we saw in the previous volume, Grandi was hostile to Italy's participation in the war and did everything possible to prevent it, going so far as to September 1, 1939, to the point of suggesting to the Council of Ministers the opportunity to radically review relations with Germany and, on April 21, to write to Mussolini to warn him against hasty decisions: then, faced with the unexpected collapse of France, he too had thought for a moment that Mussolini might be right and, once Italy had entered the war, he had, like Balbo and other opponents of the alliance with Germany, aligned his behavior with the old English motto that he had reminded Chamberlain of shortly before Munich: "right or wrong, my country."

However, the events of late 1940 and early 1941, particularly the campaign in Greece, soon changed his mind and from then on he always believed that it was necessary to find a way to get Italy out of the conflict before it was too late. Given his long tenure as ambassador to London from 1932 to 1939, his knowledge of the English political environment, and his excellent relations with some of the most important figures in the political and diplomatic life of that country, starting with Churchill, even after the United States had entered the war, his hopes for negotiations in this regard had always been directed toward England rather than the United States. even after the latter had entered the war, his hopes for negotiations in this regard had always been directed towards England. In July 1942, at a time when the military and political situation was still not unfavorable to possible negotiations, they even seemed to be taking shape. As Minister of Justice, Grandi was working on the drafting of the new civil and civil procedure codes, which led to an invitation from the Royal Spanish Academy of Legal Studies to visit Madrid. In the Spanish capital was the British ambassador Samuel Hoare, his old friend and close collaborator of Churchill, and, at the same time, there would also be another of his good friends, the Duke of Alba, Spanish ambassador to London: sa-

It could have been an opportunity for an initial sounding out to establish the British willingness to negotiate and the basis for such negotiations. Mussolini, who had long been suspicious of him (the scarcity and coldness of his references to him during talks with De Bagnac are significant in this regard), had initially authorized Grandi to accept the invitation; after a few days, however, he changed his mind, apparently fearing that it would arouse suspicion among the Germans. The opportunity for a sounding out had thus vanished and, in any case, it is unthinkable that, even if it had been successful, it would have been possible at that moment to convince Mussolini to follow it up, which, all things considered, also applies to the king.

Much has been said about Grandi's personality and his relationship with Mussolini, often without any attempt at impartiality, and it is likely that the debate will continue. One thing is certain: Grandi was, on the one hand, a man of great ambition, aware of his considerable political abilities and of the "gap" that separated him from the vast majority of other leaders, but on the other hand, he was extremely cautious, highly skilled at not revealing himself and not giving Mussolini (whose personality he knew well, with all its nuances, qualities, and limitations, and how to play on them and, at the very least, benefit from them) any ammunition, and even more so his numerous opponents within the regime to bring charges against him. Among these, the most bitter were Ciano, who had always been deeply jealous of him and for years had considered him the biggest obstacle to his succession to Mussolini, and Farinacci, who saw in him everything a fascist should not be and an opponent of Germany. After having been excellent, their relations had been very poor for most of the 1930s, until their common aversion to Germany and Italy's entry into the war had brought them closer together, his relationship with Balbo, whom he reproached for certain character flaws, a sort of 'Renaissance' taste for intrigue and his political restlessness towards Mussolini. Nor, on closer inspection, did his conception of fascism as a necessary but temporary phenomenon, essentially linked to Mussolini's life, his lack of interest in ideological 'mysteries' (in essence, even corporatism), his 'Anglomania', his tendency to keep as much to himself as possible, not to mix with the other leaders and, at the same time, to try to *ménager* Mussolini, "disobeying" him but at the same time praising him. Even though dear

Written with the benefit of hindsight and at a particularly frustrating moment, a page from Bottai's diary is particularly significant, as it clearly shows that even the editor of *Critica fascista* did not consider himself a true fascist at heart:

Man has always loved devious ways and double-dealing, of which he can be considered a forerunner. For twenty years, he managed to be the most blatant "Mussolinian" and the most subtle "anti-Mussolinian": and between these two attitudes, he lacked the right to be a fascist. I mean, he failed to understand fascism in its historical evolution and to side with those who fought to give it social content and method...

He ignored the revisionist movement, which I promoted and led, as well as

on July 25 and especially after the publication of Mussolini's *Storia di un anno* (*History of a Year*), in which, as will be seen in the next volume, the "Duce" would have lashed out with particular ferocity and sarcasm against "the Count of Mordano." Grandi would respond to this accusation in his memoirs, stating that he had taken sides, on July 25, against him in order to "save the country, by any means necessary, from utter ruin," but that he had always been loyal to him, even if he had not always obeyed him:

"I never considered Mussolini as someone to whom I felt bound by obligations of personal and blind loyalty, which he knew perfectly well. For me, he was never anything more than an instrument of good, or evil, for the country. And it was to the country, not to him, that I felt duty-bound to be loyal. After all, we both played with our cards on the table. He always knew what I thought, and I told him so in public conferences, in the press, in Parliament, and in my political activities in Italy and abroad. Working on his faults was often the only opportunity given to those who wanted to put his immense strength at the service of the country. He was an extraordinary figure and an undeniable myth in Italian life. For many centuries, no personality of such strength and charm, of such charismatic power, capable of intoxicating men and crowds, had appeared in the life of the nation. I never succumbed to his undeniable charm, but I always considered him the greatest political force the nation possessed. Great in his qualities, and also in his human flaws, the problem was not to fight him, but to make this force fruitful in the interests of the nation. Mussolini was like a raging river that needed to be channeled, a living flame that needed to be transformed into heat so that it would not burn. To make him and his extraordinary magic a tool for good for the country. To collaborate in his greatness not through blind and inert obedience, but through conscious and constant loyalty, to be loyal to him even in disobedience and to ensure that the latter, rather than diminishing, increased his merit: this is how I have always understood my loyalty, convinced that loyalty and obedience are not synonymous. He did not distrust me, but my ideas, which were almost always at odds with his. I was always loyal to him, when I defended him and when I felt the duty to fight him. I never deceived him; I

The reasons, existence: and in the Matteotti crisis, while I was in danger, he grabbed the deputy portfolio at the Interior Ministry. And from that season on, he avoided me, to be carried by the wave of extremist consensus, which placed him at the Foreign Ministry.

So, he became "diplomatic." He refined his square, tousled beard, dressed like... the ambassadors' tailor, learned English and the snobbery of English-speaking foreigners, isolated himself, became secretive, and had himself appointed count. His close friends and the journalists who were fed information no longer called him anything other than Count Grandi.

Assumed to the Olympus, he did not notice the corporate movement; nor did he ever, perhaps, read the "Carta del Lavoro" (Charter of Labor). He was to "discover" it a few years later, in the well-paid idleness of London. Not even our occasional collaboration in Geneva in the spring of 1932, when I got the Economic Council to accept the idea of an international corporation, had succeeded in making him sensitive to the sacred aspects of Fascism.

He suddenly became concerned about returning from the Thames; and he echoed the demands in the codes, but with an interpretation that was always backward-looking, "reactionary," restrictive, unaware of the real development that the formulas of the "Charter of Labor" had undergone since 1927. Ferrara's "proprietary corporation," "collective economic regulation," and "specialization" of monopolistic and national enterprises could not be "understood" by his unenlightened mind. His was a delayed, armchair revolution.

Despite his caution not to reveal himself, the fact that Grandi was a moderate, a critic of Mussolini's policies, and an opponent of Nazism during the war years was known to almost everyone. so much so that his name appears—as we have seen—in almost all the rumors that circulated continuously (especially when military events took a turn for the worse) about imminent government reshuffles, moderate revisions of fascist policy, or even the replacement of Mussolini and Italy's exit from the war.

Not infrequently, some of these rumors were picked up by the press in neutral countries and even by the Anglo-American press, particularly in early 1941 and from October 1942 onwards. On January 15, 1941, the News Chronicle, in a report by David Scott from Lisbon, went so far as to state that "a majority of the Fascist Grand Council would be in favor of the idea of seeking a separate peace" and that, "if secret negotiations are attempted, it is considered likely that Mr. Grandi, who has always opposed war with Great Britain, will be given the task." In the same issue, however, the British newspaper also published an article by Vernon Bartlett in which the hypothesis of a Grandi government was clearly rejected: according to the author, such a government, "or any other 'moderate' fascist government," would have been extremely dangerous for the democratic cause and could have involved England in action against the Italian people. Nor was this an isolated voice. By the end of 1942, attacks on Grandi had become particularly fierce in the United States.

very lively. They were inspired above all by certain anti-fascist exiles (Sforza, Salvemini, Max Ascoli) who saw Grandi as the instrument of a probable attempt by Victor Emmanuel III to save the monarchy and proceed with only a ^{superficial} defascistization. At the beginning of 1943, especially in February, after Grandi's removal from the government and, the following month, his appointment as Knight of the Most Holy Annunciation, even some British newspapers took sides against the "faux bonhomme" ('Times', February 8) and those who cherished the idea of making him a sort of Italian Darlan. These attacks reached their peak (thanks also to the contribution of W. Steed) in the second half of March, when it was leaked that Monsignor Spellman, returning from a mission to the Vatican, had expressed to the State Department the opinion that Grandi was a man who could 'always be counted on'.

More than once, these news reports and controversies had put Grandi in a difficult position; overall, however, they had also helped to establish his image in constitutional opposition circles as a "different" fascist who could be counted on. It was no coincidence that, as already mentioned, various members of this opposition had looked to him for a certain period, if only in view of a possible transition to the "post-Mussolini" era and a return to freedom. According to Aldo Rossini, who for a time maintained contact between these figures, in particular Soleri and Orlando, and Grandi, this attitude of willingness lasted until March-April 1943. However, Grandi did not give credence to these *advances*, nor to those made at a certain point by Ambrosio and the Princess of Piedmont, and did not want to run the risk of being compromised in any way. He considered Princess Maria José to be a gossip; he had neither esteem nor trust in the military; as for the constitutional opposition, despite having good personal relations with some of its representatives, he was convinced that it would not be able to bring about any change. Similarly, he had always kept as far away as possible from the fascist "opposition": even towards its most intelligent members, he harbored a mixture of mistrust and distrust, so he had always preferred to keep to himself, staying in Bologna as much as possible and, when he was in Rome, focusing above all on maintaining his image as a "different" fascist, both as Minister of Justice and as President of the Chamber of Deputies. At the most dramatic moment of the crisis pro-

prompted by the coincidence of the reversals in Africa with Mussolini's illness in October-November 1942, he must have thought for a moment about the possibility of doing something, but as soon as he realized that this was not possible, he gave up and waited for ^{better} times. However, this episode must have weighed heavily on him, must have further entrenched him in his long-held conviction that the only lever to oust Mussolini and get Italy out of the war was the sovereign.

The others could not be relied upon and, apart from any other consideration, the way they were acting was totally counterproductive, because it ended up paralyzing even Vittorio Emanuele III, whose actual attitude Grandi knew practically nothing about, but whom he knew well enough to realize that, even if he was ready for a drastic solution, it would be precisely the maneuvering, the "conspiracies," ambitions, and lack of effective ideas on how to deal with the situation that were rampant in those weeks. Some statements he made to Pirelli the day after speaking to the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations about the great bombing of Genoa on November 16, 1942, are indicative:

ment to impose a revision, a revision that should be carried out by Mussolini himself. He believes that Bottai's loyalty to the monarchy can be counted on. He praises Ciano's ingenuity, but... For example, Federzoni should be reinstated as president of the Senate (and why not Benedetto Croce at the Academy?). He would see Bottai in the Party, not De Vecchi, and Rossini would be a man to be valued. There is a lack of a general with prestige; between Badoglio and Caviglia, Caviglia is better, as he is also esteemed for his perfect integrity.

It is a mistake to think of giving the Prince of Piedmont tasks that could compromise his prestige.

Mussolini, despite Grandi's insistence, did not want to speak in the Chamber of Deputies, nor does he want to speak to the country. He oscillates between moments of depression and moments of rigidity.

While he was minister, Grandi had frequent opportunities to see Victor Emmanuel III and to reveal his feelings to him. After February 12, that is, after his farewell visit to the sovereign in his capacity as minister, such opportunities ceased. It is not easy to determine precisely what the sovereign's feelings toward him were. In fact, a series of consistent facts and testimonies allow us to conclude that Victor Emmanuel III had esteem and sympathy for Grandi and, more importantly, considerable confidence in his political qualities and abilities, which he did not seem to have for other fascist and anti-fascist politicians of the time, what Puntoni reports in his diary in relation to the farewell visit on February 12 seems to contradict this conclusion. After the audience, Grandi went to greet him and expressed his thoughts on the military and internal situation:

Italy should try to gradually detach itself from Germany in order to make the collapse less painful. I have always been in favor of a policy of understanding with Great Britain... Faced with the apathy of a large mass of people, apathy generated by mistrust of their leaders, there is resentment among many elements of the old fascism who have been blocked in their desire to act and serve their country. For them, fascism was supposed to be an instrument of redemption. At any moment, with the military disaster, a political movement with a social basis could emerge, which the communists would immediately exploit. Only the King, at the right moment, will be able to put things right. However, it will be a very difficult and dangerous operation. For my part, I am with the King.

Later, the first aide-de-camp reported Grandi's remarks to the king, who commented:

In reality, unless new elements lead us to revise our opinion, we believe that Puntoni's judgment should not be taken literally, but read in reference to the particular moment in which it was pronounced (while the affair of the granting of the collar of the Santissima Annunziata to Grandi was brewing, and the sovereign did not know how it would end from a political point of view) and, above all, to the twisted psychology of Victor Emmanuel III, to his hypersensitivity to any lack of "discretion," even if committed, as in this specific case, by one of his closest collaborators, namely General Puntoni, to whom Grandi had made the mistake of repeating what he had said to the sovereign. To clarify the king's attitude towards Grandi, based on the available documentation, we believe that, rather than this episode, it is better to rely on others, three in particular, which are recorded in Grandi's own diary. The first is the presentation, on March 25, of the insignia of Knight of the Most Holy Annunciation. On this occasion, the sovereign spoke to Grandi in very flattering terms. It is true that when Grandi tried to broach the subject of politics, the sovereign practically prevented him from speaking, but as he took his leave, he said words that Grandi could not fail to interpret as a clear political indication and an invitation to work in conjunction with him:

of your King. I am counting on you greatly. In the meantime, try to "work" as much as possible with the Legislative Assembly that you preside over. You know that I need Parliament. Then find a formal and official excuse to come and see me. But in the meantime, trust your King.

The second episode took place a few days later. Grandi had gone to see the crown prince and spoken to him about the political situation. When the king found out, he sent Acquatone to tell him that he did not approve of this and that he should not "get above himself" with the prince. The third episode took place during the audience on June 4, the last one Grandi had with the sovereign before July 25. At this point, Grandi—as Acquatone had also urged him to do—spoke plainly, especially since a question from the king ("Does the Chamber approve of the government's policy and actions?") had left him speechless:

The Chamber, he replied, is immobilized but restless. The vast majority of national councilors are waiting for nothing more than a show of strength from Your Majesty. The whole of Italy has now condemned the dictatorship and wants to get out of a war that is not its own, but only that of the dictator who proclaimed it. Until we were masters of the Mediterranean, a separate peace was possible. Today, after the decisions made in Casablanca, an honorable peace with the Allies is only possible if we have the courage to face the Germans in open battle. This is the only condition that will render the unconditional surrender decided by the enemy powers in Casablanca ineffective.

Faced with such clear words, the king's tone became harsh: "I have told you a thousand times that I am a constitutional king and that it is Parliament that must show me the way." And when Grandi tried to respond by referring to the precedents of May 1915 and October 1922, when Victor Emmanuel had ignored the neutralist and anti-fascist majorities in Parliament, he replied:

Yes, but in both cases I waited for Parliament's vote of confidence. Today Parliament is silent, imprisoned, I know, but there is also the Grand Council, which could, exceptionally, act as a substitute for Parliament.

This last sentence can undoubtedly be understood as a clear indication of the basis on which to operate, but in our opinion it cannot be taken out of context, i.e. from the part of the speech that refers to the attitude to be adopted towards the Germans. In this regard, the king was very explicit:

Confronting Germany in open battle to neutralize the decisions made in Casablanca leaves me doubtful. Our military intelligence service is certain that the enemy forces will soon attempt to land in Sicily or Sardinia. I believe Sardinia is more likely. But such a military operation will not be easy for the Anglo-American armed forces. Our troops will resist and fight back. We still have time to make decisions which – I ask you to keep what I am telling you secret – I will take at the appropriate moment. That moment has not yet come. Trust your king and work to facilitate my task by mobilizing the Legislative Assembly and perhaps the Grand Council as a substitute for Parliament. But do not reveal to anyone what I have told you.

And when Grandi asked, "Not even to the Minister of the Royal Household who is waiting for me in the antechamber?", he replied curtly: "Not even to him. You are a member of the Order of the Annunciation and a member of the Crown Council. I will act and decide at the appropriate time, but I will not reveal my decisions to anyone in advance." And then the usual refrain: "Trust your king."

In light of these words, it is easy to understand why Grandi left the audience on June 4, on the one hand reassured that the sovereign had truly realized the extreme gravity of the situation, but on the other hand concerned about his tendency to procrastinate and doubtful about his ability ^{to take risks}. As for Victor Emmanuel III, our opinion is that, if he had to be convinced that Grandi could play an important role in Mussolini's removal, certainly more important than that of the opposition, he must have rejected his idea of an immediate reversal of the situation: an idea that was not only "reckless" but inconceivable to him, going against both his most deeply rooted

rules of conduct, both to his plans, which, as we have seen, instead envisaged a two-stage operation, first the liquidation of Mussolini, then the armistice with the Anglo-Americans, and were not to contemplate in any way the transition to the offensive against the Germans. But at this point it was no longer a matter of differing political assessments: it was a clear contrast between two temperaments, two cultures, two ways of conceiving life that had nothing in common and, at least at that moment, could not possibly be reconciled. The king realized this immediately, but it took Grandi almost two more months.

Despite the concerns and doubts raised in him by his meeting with the sovereign, until the Allied landing in Sicily Grandi had continued to hope for intervention by Victor Emmanuel III and had persevered in his usual tactic of keeping himself apart and not getting involved in the fruitless maneuvering and contacts that were flourishing everywhere, not even giving credence to the news that his trusted Zamboni gathered in the circles of the Supreme Command.

For some time, at least since December 1941, when he had declined the invitation of the secretary general of the PNF, Adelchi Serena, to hold a conference for the National Fascist Institute of Culture on the anniversary of January 3, Grandi had avoided participating in party initiatives. On June 28, however, he had attended a ceremony in memory of Balbo held in Ferrara in the presence of various prominent leaders. We have two accounts of the episode that clearly show what his state of mind was in those weeks. De Bono's account has, so to speak, general value:

Of course, there was a lot of talk, and how - The situation was laid bare, and it is irreparable! And all the blame is - rightly - placed on Mussolini... Grandi is the blackest... He sees no way out...

Scorza's testimony, on the other hand, is more ^{specific}. Commenting with him on Balbo's commemorative speech, Grandi had said:

to incite the Italians to resistance. He remained in Bologna, hoping that now, finally, the king would consider the time ripe to take control of the situation. However, since the sovereign still showed no intention of acting, after a few days he attempted provocation, sending General Puntoni a letter ^{worded as follows}:

Dear Puntoni, the news from Sicily has caused my Italian heart deep sorrow. Almost a hundred years after King Carlo Alberto issued the Statute of the Kingdom and began, with the Risorgimento, the struggle for freedom, unity, and independence of Italy, the homeland is heading towards defeat and dishonor.

Then, having lost all hope in Vittorio Emanuele III's ability to take action and having probably received the first news of the upcoming convening of the Grand Council (which, moreover, he did not consider imminent), on the evening of July 19, he left Bologna for Rome, now determined to play the "big game" and taking with him a first draft of what would become his agenda:

While Grandi left Bologna for Rome, Ambrosio returned to the capital from Feltre. As far as we know, until the morning of the 26th, the Chief of Staff did not meet with the sovereign; however, on the afternoon of the 20th, as soon as he returned to the Supreme Command, he saw Acquarone,¹⁰ whom he had to give a detailed report on the progress of the meetings with the Germans, and it is unthinkable that the Minister of the Royal Household did not immediately report this to the king. Some brief news about the meeting in Feltre and, above all, a "desolate" picture of the military situation in Sicily (the Supreme Command now expected the loss of the island "in the short term" and, unless Germany immediately made available "at least two thousand aircraft" and "several divisions," considered it impossible to prevent the subsequent invasion of the peninsula) Vittorio Emanuele III had them

then on the 21st by General Puntoni, who had spoken with Deputy Chief of Staff Rossi the previous morning. On the same occasion, the first aide-de-camp also showed him the letter written to him by ^{Grandi}. The king, who on the afternoon of the 19th, when he had gone to visit the San Lorenzo and Tuscolano districts and the Littorio and Ciampino airports, had been greeted by the population with "icy silence" and a hostile attitude, and had been told by Acerbo and De Marsico that it was necessary to "change at all costs" ("the regime is no longer viable... but this is not easy for two reasons: first, our disastrous military situation, and second, the presence of the Germans in Italy," he commented to Puntoni the next day)²· he replied: "Tomorrow I will speak frankly with the Duce"³· And the next day, at the end of his audience with Mussolini, he reportedly said to Puntoni⁴:

Ambrosio's influence was even less, probably less than that of Castellano, who from a certain point onwards moved closer to Acquarone than to him. Essentially, all decisions were taken by the king alone, based on his own considerations and moods, on which Acquarone had less influence than the sovereign led him to believe, and Ambrosio very little, if any. And when we say Ambrosio, we are not referring only to the person of the chief of staff, but also to the supreme command, the military leadership, and even the deterioration of the military situation. For this, of course, was the backdrop and *raison d'être* of that policy, but it did not have much impact on its evolution and dissolution and, above all, on the king's decisions.

The landing in Sicily and the collapse, after the first three days, of hopes of driving back the invader had led Ambrosio to express to the sovereign more clearly than in previous weeks his considerations on the increasing urgency of removing Mussolini from power and installing a military government. After what he had already told him before the landing (and which, as we have seen, the king had not really appreciated very much), he returned to talk to him about it on July 14, when the situation in Sicily had begun to deteriorate and only catastrophic predictions were to be heard. It was most likely on this occasion that Victor Emmanuel III "warned Ambrosio that he would withdraw Mussolini's mandate," but he also told him that he "reserved the right to inform him of the date of the event with one week's notice." Given the "technical" problems and, therefore, the time required for the operation, these two statements suggest that he was not thinking of a date in the very near future, if indeed he was still uncertain about what to do and wanted to use them to silence Ambrosio. This is all the more so given that the next day, more than four months after their previous meeting, he agreed to receive Badoglio and made it clear to him that he would be the new head of government, but he did not give the marshal a date either, so it is not unreasonable to think that, just as he had wanted to silence Ambrosio the day before, now what mattered most to him was to silence Acquarone (who had insisted on the audience) and put a stop to Badoglio's maneuvering, his playing on several sides. Nor did the outcome of the Feltre meeting really affect his final decision, on the

This, perhaps, had the greatest impact, albeit only for a moment, but - mind you - in a negative sense, as a brake, that is, the message from Roosevelt and Churchill to the ^{Italian} people.

For the conference in Feltre, Ambrosio had prepared an extensive memorandum on "the political and military conduct of the war by ^{the Axis}"², which would have enabled Mussolini to confront Hitler, if necessary, with the issue of Italy's disengagement on the basis of precise and documented facts. In particular, it was intended to challenge the Germans on their mistakes and failures towards their ally, their "lack of understanding" and their "deliberate disregard" of the importance of the Mediterranean theater, which, if they could find "explanation, not justification" until 1942, 'when the unpreparedness of the Anglo-Americans meant that decisive enemy operations in the Mediterranean could be ruled out, while there was still the possibility of definitively eliminating the Russian threat before the Anglo-American preparations were completed', they could no longer find any explanation or justification in 1943, "when the enemy's preparations made it easy to predict that the Anglo-Americans would attempt to attack the European fortress in the Mediterranean theater in order to open that second front, the realization of which would almost certainly lead to the military defeat of the Axis." During the conference, he fought firmly and decisively to persuade Mussolini to address the issue with Hitler, supporting Bastianini and Alfieri, who were also trying to convince him that this was the last chance to do so, and certainly not mincing his words if Bastianini could then write that neither Orlando, nor Salandra, nor Giolitti, faced with language such as he used, would have hesitated to dismiss him. He went so far as to issue a veritable ultimatum: Italy had to withdraw from the war within fifteen days.

Returning to Rome on the evening of July 19, Ambrosio was well aware that not only would the Germans not provide any real help (and what they did provide would not be available for two months), but that their goal was to take direct control of the situation in Italy, entrusting Italian troops, which, according to their plans, were to be sent to the south, the task of fighting the Allies and replacing them in the center-north with their own, thus proceeding with a full-fledged occupation. Yet the next morning, when he was received by Mussolini at noon, he no longer used the ultimatum tone of the day before, so much so that

that Mussolini, receiving Bastianini half an hour later, said that he seemed "very calm." The clash between the two took place in the late afternoon, when Ambrosio returned to Palazzo Venezia from 8:10 p.m. to 8:55 p.m. It was then that, after Mussolini told him that he had reconsidered the previous day's conversation and had decided to write to Hitler to obtain Italy's disengagement, Ambrosio became indignant and tendered his resignation as chief of staff (which the "Duce" rejected), justifying it on the grounds that Mussolini had missed the opportunity in Feltre to discuss such a vital matter in person, failing in his commitment to him to maintain a firm stance toward the Germans.

It is almost certain that after Feltre Ambrosio no longer had any hope in Mussolini; however, such a radical change of attitude in the space of a few hours can only be explained either by a nervous breakdown or by his meeting with Acquatone at 5 p.m. Before the commission of inquiry into the failure to defend

He had made up his mind, and this is precisely what led him to suddenly change his attitude towards Mussolini, hoping that his resignation would force the king to at least begin to take a stand for him, because, at that point, the choice had become inevitable. Nor can it be entirely ruled out that in doing so Ambrosio felt he was fulfilling a dual duty, towards his country, but also, knowing the moods circulating among his own younger colleagues (typical in this regard is the episode of his clash with Castellano ¹), towards the monarchy and the sovereign himself. The fact that his resignation was not formally followed up is, all things considered, of little importance, given the rapid deterioration of the situation in the days that followed.

That said, to complete our focus on Ambrosio's position and role, we feel we must reiterate that what we know about the events between July 20 and 22 does not seem to us to be so conclusive as to suggest that the king had actually made his decision before the 23rd (and the uncertainty surrounding the actual substance of his conversation with Mussolini on the morning of the 22nd leads us not to rule out a *priori* that, if a decision had been made, there could also have been a 'change of heart') and that, rather, it suggests a situation that was still fluid. This leads us to conclude that, as we have already said, the decisive factor that really prompted Victor Emmanuel III to act was the news, before the meeting was convened on the 22nd of the Grand Council for the afternoon of the 24th (which alarmed more than one person for fear that the meeting might result in some "decision that would hinder the action they hoped for or take the initiative away from the king"),² and then of the approval of Grandi's agenda. This was all the more so because the sovereign was informed of the substance of the operation that Grandi intended to carry out on the 22nd and again on the morning of the 23rd by Federzoni³ who spoke to Acquarone and Ambrosio about it. Nor can one say in this regard

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Audiences and meetings between Mussolini, Vittorio Emanuele III, and Ambrosio on July 20-25, 1943a-

Day	Time	Mussolini	Vittorio Emanuele III	Ambrosio
July 20	12	Ambrosio		Mussolini
	17			Acquarone
	20:10-20:55	Ambrosio		Mussolini
July 21	11:30-12:20	Ambrosio		Mussolini
	20	Ambrosio		Mussolini
July 22	10:30	Vittorio Emanuele III	Mussolini	
	12:05-12:45	Ambrosio		Mussolini
	5:30-6:45	Grandi		
	8:55	Ambrosio		Mussolini
July 23	8.15	Ambrosio (by telephone)		Mussolini (by telephone)
	ME			Federzoni
	12:18-12:47	Ambrosio		Mussolini
	7:43-8:30	Farinacci		
	8:45-9:15	Ambrosio		Mussolini
July 24	9			Chierici
	10.20		Cerica	
	11:30	Ambrosio		Mussolini
	17	<i>Grand Council</i>		
	19			Cini
July 25	9			Badoglio
	ME			Carboni
	10:30			Roatta
	12-12.25	Hidaka		
	12:10-12:45	Ambrosio		Mussolini
	17	Vittorio Emanuele III	Mussolini	
	18		Badoglio	

^aOnly *non-routine* or special meetings are listed. Where possible, the times are based on those indicated in the hearing records of the Duce's private secretariat, which almost always indicate both the start and end times of the hearing.

underestimate what Umberto II would say to G. Artieri years later, namely that his father had made the decision to replace Mussolini with Badoglio after Feltre, without however establishing the exact date, and that this initial decision was followed by the executive decision, so to speak, on the morning of July 25, when, at six o'clock, Acquarone informed him of the outcome of the Grand Council meeting. This brings us back to the role played by the Grand Council and the Grandi in the events of July 25.

The importance of Grandi's role was such that, before proceeding further with our reconstruction, we feel it is appropriate to pause for a moment to consider two points that we believe may help to clarify both the events of July 25 and the relationship between Grandi and Mussolini in this particular circumstance.

The first of these considerations again concerns Grandi's attitude towards the king. Having lost all hope in an initiative promoted by Victor Emmanuel III, Grandi took on the role, to use his own image, of Pietro Micca. Through his actions, he wanted to force the king to act, and he did so by exploiting the only avenue available to him at that time, the Grand Council, convinced that, above all, this was the most suitable instrument, not only to get rid of Mussolini, but also to force the king to take a risk, even if Victor Emmanuel III believed that the time was not yet right or did not want to take the risk: in fact, the sovereign could have accepted anything, but not being constitutionally put on notice, and, moreover, by the fascists themselves. At the same time, however, Grandi did not want to compromise the monarchy in the event of a failure of his action, nor did he want to risk jeopardizing the success of his initiative. Hence his refusal, even after the meeting of the Grand Council, to have any contact not only with the sovereign but also with Acquarone, limiting himself to sending them a copy of his agenda at the very moment he entered the Grand Council. There is no doubt that all this is logical, and one could even say that, if these were Grandi's objectives, the operation was a complete success. The real point, however, is another. For Grandi—as already mentioned—the removal of Mussolini had to result in the immediate cessation of hostilities with the Allies and a reversal of the war front. Only in this way, with a sort of *de facto* co-belligerence *ante litteram*, accompanied by the establishment of a political government of national unity that did not include any former ministers of Mussolini or men too compromised by the regime, did Grandi hope to put the Allies in difficulty, who had always maintained that the

Italy's participation in the conflict was solely Mussolini's responsibility and that they would suddenly find themselves with an unexpected new ally against Germany, persuading them not to apply the formula of unconditional surrender to Italy and instead to negotiate with it on other terms. Grandi personally saw himself as the one who would immediately begin the first negotiations in Portugal, as Churchill himself expected. However, Grandi knew that the king was opposed to a reversal of the front, so it must be assumed that he essentially relied solely on the fact that the sovereign would have to realize (or that his generals would make him understand) that the liquidation of Mussolini or, if not that, certainly the conclusion of an armistice with the Allies, which would have had to happen sooner or later, would certainly provoke German 'countermeasures' and that it was therefore better to prevent them by exploiting the element of surprise and the fact that the German forces in Italy, although already numerous, were still less substantial than those that would have been sent there as soon as news of the Duce's removal reached them. If this is true, however, it must be concluded that Grandi was guilty of both optimism and underestimation. Optimism, with regard to Victor Emmanuel III and his ability to coldly assess the situation and its developments and therefore to take risks. He was guilty of underestimation with regard to Acquarone, Badoglio, and the military, whom he completely ignored during those decisive days (while they closely followed his every move and every development in the situation) and to whom he left the field open with the sovereign.

The second consideration concerns Grandi's *modus agendi*.

towards the other members of the Grand Council. The account that Grandi left us in his book on July 25, written in Portugal in ¹⁹⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵, is—as we already mentioned in the introduction we wrote for it years ago—reticent in this regard (as in other matters) due to a mixture of feelings that were still alive and active in him: on the one hand, gratitude towards those who had allowed him to lead and win his battle in the Grand Council, and on the other, remorse for having caused their subsequent personal misfortunes and, in some cases, the death of those condemned in Verona. In reality, Grandi prepared and conducted his July 25 in a much more unscrupulous manner than appears from his account. This ruthlessness brings to mind the ruthlessness with which, when he was ambassador in London, he had taken a series of initiatives without Mussolini's knowledge and even against his intentions, counting on the fact that, if they were successful and he could present them as the result of his instructions, the "Duce" would make them his own.

When, the day after his arrival in Rome, Grandi made his first assessment of the situation with Federzoni, the two came to the conclusion that among the participants in the Grand Council meeting, there were four elements on whom they could rely: Bottai, Bastianini, Albini, and De Marsico; seven would certainly be opposed (Farinacci, Polverelli, Galbiati, Buffarini Guidi, Tringali Casanuova, Frattari, and Marinelli); the other sixteen were to be considered uncertain. In reality, it is our belief that—with the probable exception of Federzoni—Grandi personally did not place his full trust in anyone, not even Bottai, whom he must have considered too fascist and too attached to the belief that corporatism, *his* corporatism, was the new bringer of fascism, the thing that made it, or at least should have made it, the new fact of the 20th century. It was therefore impossible for Grandi to lay his cards on the table and say what objectives he intended to achieve with his agenda, and he must have been fully aware of this, so much so that, on July 22, he told Bottai that restoring political as well as military powers to the king, as desired by the Cini group, would have been the definitive solution, but it could not be supported because it was unacceptable not only to Mussolini but also "to a body such as the current Grand Council." To tell the uncertain members of the Grand Council (but also some of the "certain" ones) that with his agenda he intended to liquidate Mussolini and with him fascism ^{a n d} then wage war on Germany would have been madness. Almost no one was prepared for such a solution; some thought of embalming the "Duce," others wanted to help him out of his immobility; more than one, of course, wanted a reorganization of the regime, a loosening of the dictatorship in those aspects that made it less efficient and more unpopular, but from this to thinking of its liquidation was a long way off. Typical in this regard is De Bono's reaction on July 27, after the coup had been carried out: "We in the Grand Council have castrated ourselves. We are stupid, we have nothing at all

thought about what to do in case Mussolini was sidelined"; not to mention the opening of formal negotiations with the Allies and the simultaneous reversal of the front: even Bastianini, before talking about negotiations, thought that the outcome of the polls he had initiated, as we shall see shortly, should be known, and in any case, those who were convinced of the need to withdraw from the conflict thought that this should be done in agreement with the Germans and that only Mussolini could persuade Hitler to give his consent; A typical case is that of De Stefani, who on the morning of the 25th went to Monsignor Montini to express his opinion that negotiations should be opened immediately with Berlin for 'Italian neutrality' and with the Allies to find out how they intended to treat Italy in the event of an exit from the conflict. Immediately afterwards, he also went to Acquarone to advocate a government of national unity that would also include "some of the most moderate and representative elements of fascism" This being the case, Grandi—convinced as he was that this was the decisive and practically the only opportunity he could count on—moved from July 21 to 24 and during the same meeting of the Grand Council with the utmost ruthlessness, looking only at the result and, for the rest, letting everyone interpret his agenda and his words as they wished, as long as they supported him, even if only instrumentally. This seems to us, among other things, to be the main explanation for his attempts to convince even Scorza to adhere to his agenda, since otherwise it seems difficult to imagine that Grandi was not aware that the party secretary was pursuing entirely different projects, and that he had even made this known to Farinacci on the 23rd. Although this is only a marginal detail in this context, we believe that Grandi's willingness to accept Ciano's support is significant, even though he personally would not have wanted it for political reasons (what Ciano had long represented with his pro-German policy), moral reasons (his relationship with Mussolini), and, we would add, personal reasons (their deep-seated enmity). — as soon as the former foreign minister said he was willing to sign his agenda and Bottai supported the request. Moreover, indirect confirmation of our opinion can be found in what Federzoni wrote years later: " To tell the truth, I don't know if all the signatories still had a clear idea of the possible political effects of what we were about to do"

In a certain sense, it can be said that, if loyalty can be spoken of in this kind of situation and in such dramatic circumstances, it was with Mus-

solini that Grandi proved to be more loyal. And not only because it was necessary for him not to arouse the Duce's suspicions, which would have jeopardized the entire operation and caused it to be aborted at birth, but also to demonstrate to the undecided (and not only to them) that his agenda did not include subversive intentions toward Mussolini (which, in the final analysis, was still for many the keystone, psychological even before political, of their attitude, as demonstrated, among other things, by the two changes of heart of Suardo, during the vote, and Cianetti, the following morning), but also because, even at the moment of the decisive confrontation, he still felt a sort of respect, gratitude, and attachment, if not for the leader and statesman, then at least for the man, which can be understood only by referring to their previous relationship and which clearly transpires from the pages of some of Grandi's last writings:

After what has already been said, it is impossible to go into further detail here about these relationships. What can be said is that although Mussolini was wary, and to a certain extent had almost always been wary, of Grandi and his conception of fascism (and had sometimes even been jealous of his political and personal successes), at the same time he respected him and considered him to be of a different caliber than his other collaborators, so much so that, even though he did not entirely agree with some of his positions and initiatives and disagreed *outright* with some of them, he never deprived himself of his collaboration, resorting at most to the expedient of moving him at a certain point from one sector of activity to another and strictly forbidding him from further involvement in the one from which he was removing him. The same essentially applies to Grandi. His conception of fascism (which he understood as 'democracy in potential', from which, once it had accomplished its 'restorative task', "new political units" capable of reconciling "sociality" and "nation") was certainly not that of Mussolini, and, especially from 1931-33 onwards, his points of disagreement with both the internal and external policies of the "Duce" had gradually increased. Nevertheless, Grandi continued to consider Mussolini a "great man" endowed with exceptional human energy and capable of creating a *myth* (without which "history cannot be made") and, therefore, necessary for Italy at that historical moment. Even though he was well aware of Mussolini's character and intellectual limitations, he continued to admire him, serve him and, all things considered, love him. So even when he disobeyed him and took personal initiatives that conflicted with his policy (and especially as ambassador in London, his "disobedience" had been considerable: when, on the occasion of the remilitarization of

Rhineland, he had sided against Germany in exchange for the tacit British renunciation of extending sanctions to Italy; when, in order to pave the way for a rapprochement between Rome and London, he had accepted the principle of withdrawing Italian "volunteers" from Spain; when he had provoked Chamberlain's appeal to Mussolini, which had made the Munich conference possible), he did so relying on his knowledge of Mussolini's psychology and, therefore, on the near certainty of getting him to accept his initiatives, attributing all the credit for their success to him, but with the idea of serving him better, of helping him not to make those mistakes to which his character and his belief in his good fortune led him ("he was distrustful of everything except luck," he would write in *Ecco Mussolini*) and in his political "instinct," not with that of putting obstacles in his way.

Mussolini, in *Storia di un anno* (*History of a Year*), wrote that when, on July 22, "in the afternoon, the Duce received Grandi, who handed him the volume on non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, Grandi touched on various topics, but said nothing about what was brewing." Scorza, in turn, wrote that when he questioned Mussolini about his conversation with Grandi, he was told that the president of the Chamber had not spoken to him about his agenda or the national situation, but only about the codes and the book on Spain, and that he had not considered it appropriate to mention it to him. It is possible that Mussolini gave this answer to Scorza, but it is not possible to believe what he wrote in *Storia di un anno* (*History of a Year*). This statement is rendered incredible by the record of Mussolini's hearings compiled by his private secretariat: the audience, scheduled to last fifteen minutes, from 5:30 to 5:45 p.m., actually lasted until 6:45 p.m., and waiting in the antechamber was not only the chief of police but, from 6 p.m. onwards, also Marshal Kesselring...: to discuss, at that moment, only Grandi's book on Italian policy of non-intervention in Spain and possibly also the codes, an incredibly long audience. And, moreover, the most authoritative denial comes from Mussolini himself, who had previously noted in *his Pontine and Sardinian Thoughts*:

Since Grandi had mentioned in one of his letters to Scorza the need for a "sacred union," I summoned Grandi to ask him what "sacred union" he was referring to; that is, whether he was thinking of reviving the old parties that I had abolished and their leaders. He told me that he was thinking of a "sacred union" of all Italians to remove the partisan nature of the war. "It is time," he said, "to stop saying that this is Mussolini's war. This is everyone's war. And now the Crown must come out of its reserve. The national territory has suffered

an invasion, and the Crown remains silent. It is shirking its duty. It must assume its responsibilities. This is also, and above all, the war of Victor Emmanuel III. The country wants the Crown to abandon its reserved attitude and for the war to take on a national

Bottai's diary contains the following statement, which clearly illustrates the author's state of mind and political position a few hours before the start of the Grand Council session:

In a few hours, we will have to redeem ourselves from all this; and redeem ourselves with a clean break. It is up to Mussolini to take a position on either side of the cut, either for an extreme regeneration of Fascism in open and sincere communion with the nation, or for a return to its fate. If he wants to stand in the way, the cut of the decision will pass over him with the inexorability of a fatal conclusion.

Although different in terms of political *spirit* and desired outcomes, Grandi's position was no different when it came to Mussolini personally.

At this point, all the pieces of the mosaic of July 25 were in place except for one: the most important one, in a certain sense: Mussolini.

"The war is lost... even the king says we must make peace... everyone says so... but how?" In a moment of particular depression, Mussolini made this dramatic admission to his old doctor, Professor Cesa-Bianchi who reported it to Alberto Pirelli's wife on May 27 or 28, 1943. However, it cannot be ruled out that it dates back a few weeks, perhaps a month earlier. In fact, Mussolini must have come to this bitter conclusion, if not after the Anglo-American landing in North Africa—which, however, must have begun to dawn on him—then after the second Klessheim conference on April 29-30, when it became clear that Rome's entirely negative assessments of the German attitude after the first – that of April 7-8 – could only be confirmed and, if possible, in even more drastic terms, as it was now clear that the aid that the Germans would give to Italy would be much less than necessary, that Berlin had no intention of truly accepting the Italian point of view regarding the need to give a "positive" content to the vague (and, moreover, daily contradicted by the reality of German policy in the occupied countries) talk about the 'New Order' and the 'New Europe' that had been made up to that point and, above all, that Hitler was not in the least willing to review his political strategy for the war but, on the contrary, was still determined to wage war in the east to the bitter end and knock the USSR out of action.

Mussolini attached great importance to German aid, but he also understood that, on its own, it would only represent a matter of survival for Italy; in other words, it would not resolve the situation and would accentuate his dependence and subjugation to Germany. As for the strategy that Bastianini wanted to build around the much-vaunted "Charter of Europe" and a solemn positive outline of the "New Europe," Mussolini—as we have already said—did not believe in it: if it aimed at strengthening Europe internally, on the one hand, it came too late, and on the other, it would never have been accepted by Berlin; if, on the other hand, it was intended to lessen the price that Italy (and with it Hungary, Romania, and perhaps Bulgaria) would have to pay to get out of the war, Mussolini had not yet resigned himself to accepting the idea of having to admit defeat. *His* real card, the one on which he was now staking everything, was the end of the war in the east, or at least the defensive stabilization of the eastern front (the so-called "eastern wall") and the transfer of the Axis war effort to the Mediterranean to play the final and decisive game there.

To be fair, this idea was not dictated solely by despair, by the sense that the end was near and by a desire to cling to hope. One can debate how realistic it actually was; one of the greatest political scientists and theorists of international relations, R. Aron, for example, vigorously supported the thesis of the impossibility of a separate peace between Germany and the Soviet Union; but one cannot either take it lightly, so to speak, or—as practically all scholars have done so far—reduce it, as far as Mussolini is concerned, to a mere expedient, that would only demonstrate how much the 'Duce' had by then lost all ability to judge the situation realistically and was clinging to it in order to give those around him the impression that he once again had the solution 'in his pocket' and thus to postpone much more realistic decisions that he did not want to resign himself to taking.

A whole series of facts demonstrates that the idea of a possible second agreement—albeit this time under very different conditions from the first—between Germany and the USSR, between National Socialism and Bolshevism, was certainly not the sole brainchild of Mussolini but, on the contrary, a widespread idea that aroused fears and hopes and was taken seriously at the highest levels of international politics, in London and Washington as well as in Tokyo. On the basis of this idea, there were also direct and indirect contacts between the Germans and the Soviets, about which much is already known; but much remains to be discovered.

still shrouded in mystery. The emergence in recent years, thanks to Gorbachev's *glasnost*, of some admissions by the Soviets (after decades of total silence and arrogant denials) is certainly not enough to shed complete light on them and has so far been limited to a single concrete case, which, moreover, occurred in October 1941, at a time when catastrophe seemed imminent for the Soviets. We refer to the case of the task given on October 5 of that year by Stalin to Beria to seek contact with Berlin to conclude a peace based on the cession of the three Baltic republics annexed by the USSR under the pact with Hitler two years earlier, Belarus, Moldova, and part of Ukraine. This step was not followed up, it seems, because Hitler—now confident of victory—would have considered it a personal initiative, unbeknownst to Stalin and Beria, and therefore dropped it; but it is of particular interest to us because Beria used the Bulgarian ambassador to Moscow, Stamenov, as an intermediary to inform Hitler of the proposal. so it is natural to think that, given the kinship between King Boris and Victor Emmanuel III, it is not unlikely that Rome knew something about the Soviet plan, and why it was precisely at the end of 1941 that, despite the triumphalist tone of German communiqués, Mussolini began to show the first signs of concern about the protracted war in the East, wanting to be better informed about the actual military situation on the Eastern Front and the effort it required of the Germans, and not hiding his favor and interest in the first vague rumors coming from Tokyo about the possibility of a separate peace between the Axis and the USSR: favored by Japanese good offices:

On the German side, at the beginning, it was mainly the military leadership that looked favorably on the possibility of peace with the USSR was mainly a part of the military leadership, concerned about the unexpected and increasingly dramatic cost in blood, resources, and energy (and the possible internal repercussions of this) that the operations in the east entailed, as well as the delay in time—and, from the winter of 1942-43, the increasing uncertainty about the actual possibility of

separate Friedensschlüsse 1942-1945. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehung des Kalten Krieges, in "Military History Communications," 1976, no. 2, pp. 95 ff.; 1. FLEISHHAUER, *Die Chance des Sonderfriedens. Deutsch-sovietische Geheimgespräche 1941-1945*, Berlin 1986.

¹ See N. PAVLENKO, *The history of the war has not yet been written* (in Russian), in "Ogonek," no. 25, 1989, pp. 7 ff.; ID., *Tragedy and Triumph of the Red Army* (in Russian), in *Moskovskie novosti*, May 7, 1989, pp. 8 ff.; D. PEEV, *Now We Can Talk About This* (in Russian), in *Moskovskie novosti*, June 25, 1989, p. 2.

N. Pavlenko was editor-in-chief of the Soviet military history magazine; He first heard about the episode in 1954 during the "Beria case" from G. Terekhov of the USSR prosecutor's office, and later, in the mid-1960s, he received a detailed account of it from Marshal Zhukov, who had been present at the meeting between Stalin and Beria during which the latter was ordered to try to contact Hitler. D. Peev, son of a Soviet secret service agent, was at the Bulgarian embassy in Moscow in 1944 and heard

achieve it—the long-awaited victory. This was all the more so because some of them, such as von Manstein, did not consider an agreement between the "two revolutions." They were soon joined by various politicians, including some of the most prominent, who would never have dared to openly oppose the Führer, but who, precisely for this reason, the more time passed, the more they welcomed Italian attempts, and in particular those of Mussolini, to convince Hitler to adopt a more realistic attitude. All the more so because the Japanese were also pressing in the same direction and—even more importantly, as A. Hillgruber has clearly shown—from the end of 1942, Russian peace overtures began to multiply and become more urgent, and therefore could no longer be ignored even by Hitler, who, willingly or unwillingly, authorized the establishment of appropriate 'channels' with Soviet agents (especially in Stockholm, but also in Turkey) and even to hold secret meetings at the highest level, as was the case in June 1943 between von Ribbentrop and Molotov near Kirovograd.

The fact that Stalin still thought about making peace with Hitler after Stalingrad may surprise many readers accustomed to a certain view of World War II and, in this case, of the Soviet attitude toward Nazi Germany. The truth is that Stalin was "an extremely disenchanted and realistic thinker" for whom ideological motivations and prejudices were extremely important as instruments of power (at home) and influence (abroad), but were entirely secondary—not to say, with Ortega y Gasset, a mere camouflage—compared to the strong core of his typically Russian culture and political vision. Hence his substantial behavior as a Russian and solely and exclusively in the interests of Greater Russia, of a reality and a myth that had their deep roots in Russian national history, in its traditional culture, in its anthropological and geopolitical sensibility. The victory achieved at Stalingrad, however important it was from a military point of view (and perhaps even more so from a political, prestige, and propaganda point of view), could not yet be considered decisive. Not only had the Red Army and the Soviet economy not yet truly recovered from the blows inflicted on them in the first year of the war, but despite the brutality of the regime

German occupation, the anti-communist (especially among peasants) and nationalist unrest that had threatened to destroy the Soviet Union from within at the time of the German attack had completely subsided. But more importantly, Stalin realized that even if he won (and this was not yet certain, given the continuing uncertainty about Japan's real intentions), "at the end of the war, the Soviet Union would find itself totally exhausted, while the US would be in a position to dictate the terms of peace as the far stronger 'imperialist' power." This was all the more so because Stalin was and remained convinced for a long time—at least until the Anglo-American landing in France in June 1944—that the Allies were delaying the opening of the "second front" and sending him, in his opinion, less aid than they could have provided and than he had asked them for, precisely for this purpose. Given this military situation and this prospect for the future, Stalin's *Russian* realism (the same *Russian* realism that on May 15, 1943, led him to dissolve the Communist International, thinking that this would reassure the world and democratic governments about his future intentions) found a compromise with Hitler that would reestablish, at the end of 1942 - early 1943, the situation of 1939-41 (possibly with some adjustments to Germany's advantage) or, in the autumn-winter of 1943, when the course of the conflict had become more favorable to the USSR, that of 1914 appeared to be a necessary solution. Concluding peace with Hitler meant, in fact, achieving at least three fundamental results for the Soviet Union in those circumstances. *First*: averting the still real risk of defeat and being able to devote itself to rebuilding and strengthening its economy and military apparatus. *Second*: "to allow," as Hillgruber² wrote, "the German army, still intact overall despite the severity of the individual defeats it had suffered, to disengage from the Soviet Union and reconvert towards the West, so as to intensify the war against the British and Americans to the maximum." *Third*: to try to agree with Germany on new spheres of interest which, depending on how the conflict ended, could have constituted either reference points for the definitive systematization of their respective hegemonies or commodities for exchange, or advanced positions from which to retreat without having to start defending the "empire" already within its borders.

In Hitler, ideological motivations often prevailed over realism; his position on repeated Soviet polls and pressure exerted on him by some of his collaborators and certain

his position in the face of repeated Soviet probes and pressure exerted on him by some of his collaborators and certain

of his allies, such as Antonescu and above all Mussolini, to persuade him to make peace with the USSR, can hardly be accused of idealism. If this did take over at a certain point, it was when defeat became an increasingly imminent prospect for him. It was then that Hitler ended up conceiving of the war as a whole, and the war in the East in particular, from an entirely ideological perspective: faced with the 'discouraging' demonstration that the German people were 'morally too weak' to understand that for Germany the dilemma, the historical alternative, was 'either world power or the end' and to behave and fight accordingly, what, at least, had to be achieved was what he considered his true

"historic mission": the "liberation" of Europe from the "Jewish plague" (of which Bolshevism was, for him, one of the products and instruments). Hence his rejection of the idea of peace with the USSR and his insistence on a "containment strategy" in the east, sacrificing much of the German army to it and renouncing action on other fronts, which, while certainly not capable of reversing the tide of war, might perhaps have made a partially different outcome possible; all in order to have time to round up the Russian Jewish population and send them to the extermination camps. At first, however, Hitler's objections to those who advocated peace with Stalin were based on a realism that was difficult to dispute. To Ciano, who—as we shall see shortly—had conveyed Mussolini's request to him on December 18, 1942, and less than a month later to Marshal Antonescu, he replied with two main arguments: that it would take the Russians only six months to reorganize their forces, so that "a new Russian power would rise, against which Germany would then have to fight again," and that there was "not a single [border] line on which Germany and the Soviet Union could agree with regard to their respective needs for food and raw materials." He explained to them the profound difference between the situation in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of 1918 and what would happen in the event of an Axis defeat: at that time, Russia was exhausted and its military collapse had created a vacuum in its "space" and led to the emergence and strengthening of states that had filled that vacuum, which had made it possible to stabilize the situation to some extent. now, however, the situation would be characterized by the existence of a powerful Bolshevik empire, highly industrialized, rich in raw materials and enormous human masses, which would energetically pursue Russia's traditional expansionist objectives in Europe.

Rather than a separate peace with the USSR, Hitler, faithful in this to the traditional interpretative frameworks of international politics of the age

Guglielmina, if anything, was aiming for a break in the alliance between her enemies; in particular between Great Britain and the US (due to the policy of dismantling and replacing the British Empire pursued by the Americans) and, secondarily, between Great Britain and the USSR (for control of India) and between the USSR and the Allies, but only at a later stage, after the Tehran Conference at the end of November 1943.

It is a fact that relations between London and Washington on the one hand and Stalin on the other were neither easy nor clear-cut in 1941-43 and, ultimately, even after the Allied landing in France. It is also a fact that one of their main characteristics was for a long time (and this is hardly surprising when one considers the reactions provoked in the West by the German-Soviet pact of 1939) the Anglo-French plans to attack the USSR, which were drawn up during the *drôle de guerre* and not implemented only because of the onset of the German offensive.-Soviet pact of 1939, the Anglo-French plans to attack the USSR prepared during the *drôle de guerre* and not implemented only because of the German offensive against France, the anti-Soviet attitude of large sectors of American public opinion and its persistence for some time after the German attack on the USSR, the suspicions and fears aroused in Stalin by the "Hess affair," and the ambiguous relations between Moscow and Tokyo), mutual suspicion and, on the part of the Allies, especially the Americans, first mistrust and then uncertainty about the Soviets' actual ability to stand up to the Germans. This mistrust weighed heavily on Roosevelt's attitude for about a year and contributed to his reluctance to commit himself, as Stalin had demanded in no uncertain terms ("until there is agreement on these two fundamental issues," he had written to Churchill on November 8, 1941¹: "Anglo-Soviet relations will lack not only clarity, but, to put it bluntly, mutual trust," "on the objectives of the war and the regulation of peace after the war," that is, on future Soviet territorial acquisitions. Not to mention the conviction that, as we openly, mutual trust"), "on the objectives of the war and the regulation of peace after the war," that is, on future Soviet territorial acquisitions. Not to mention the conviction that, as we have seen, Stalin continued to harbor at least until the summer of 1944—even when he had already had to change his mind about Roosevelt's actual attitude toward him—that the Americans and British were deliberately delaying the opening of the "second front" in order to force the USSR to wear down its forces as much as possible and thus bring it to the end of the conflict exhausted.

There is no doubt that this suspicion was unfounded. Such an intention could certainly not be attributed to ^{Roosevelt}, who would have

He even wanted to establish a bridgehead in France as early as the fall of 1942, precisely in order to ease German pressure on Russia in some way, and if he did not send the USSR more aid than the already considerable amount provided by the US, it was not because he was thinking about the post-war period, but because of the objective difficulty of transporting it and the need to implement and modify the rearmament program (the "Victory program") launched in July 1941 for the benefit of the Air Force and Navy, assuming that the Soviet Union would not be able to sustain the major war effort against Germany. The greatest 'Machiavellianism' attributable to the Americans was their desire to be sure, before radically changing their plans and committing themselves fully to Europe, instead of concentrating the bulk of their war potential on Japan for the time being, that the Russian army would be able to hold out until the winter of 1942-43 and constitute - thanks also to Allied aid - by the following spring, a real force had been built up, enabling the Anglo-Americans to attack the "European fortress" from the south. Nor, on closer inspection, was Stalin's suspicion of Churchill any more well-founded. The fact that the British prime minister worked to shelve the idea (which was also very risky from a military point of view) of establishing a relief bridgehead in France and instead proceeded with the occupation of North Africa and then the attack on Italy was a clear sign of his desire to avoid a confrontation with the Germans.

in the post-war period, they would prevent – if necessary even by force of arms – the USSR from interfering politically and economically in Europe; c) that, again in the post-war period, the US, Great Britain, and Germany would have superpower status, and Germany would dominate continental Europe politically and economically, including Ukraine. Since von Papen had shown himself to be not unwilling, but desirous of a more authoritative commitment than that which a mere emissary of Donovan could give him, the latter submitted the project and the report of the Ankara talks to Roosevelt and expressed his conviction that, if "the coup" succeeded and the "culprits were punished," Germany's capitulation would be assured. Roosevelt, however, did not follow up on the project. See A. C. BROWN, *The Last Hero: Wild Bill Donovan*, New York 1982, pp. 366 ff.; N. N. YAKOVLEV, F. D. Roosevelt: *Man and Politician*, Moscow 1988, pp. 405 ff. (in Russian).

A report on "US plans for the continuation of military operations" sent on September 1, 1942, to the Foreign Ministry by the Italian legation in Lisbon is significant in this regard. Among other things, it states:

"According to a belief that is currently widespread in the United States and seems to be gaining ground in England as well, the few weeks that now separate us from the beginning of winter should be decisive for the fate of nations and the outcome of the current conflict.

In Washington, it is believed that if it is not knocked out within the next two months, the Russian army will almost certainly be able to hold out until spring and, during that period, spring Germany some surprises no less unpleasant than those it experienced last winter...

The United States' offensive program for next year appears to be extremely ambitious and would include systematic preparation for possible attacks both against the territories occupied by Germany in Western Europe and against Italy, which is ostentatiously considered by US leaders to be the "Achilles' heel" of the Axis.

Military events in the coming months should indicate to the Washington government which of these theaters of operation is best suited to exerting the greatest effort against the Axis armies, but there are also those who hope that circumstances will change to such an extent that both attacks will be possible at the same time... This plan, which is now beginning to take shape with sufficient clarity and therefore seems to me worthy of mention, naturally presupposes that the Russian army can hold out until winter without suffering those truly decisive and irreparable defeats that would definitively put it out of the conflict...

[In England] the interpretation of the decisive importance of the current phase of the conflict does not differ substantially from that prevailing in Washington. I will limit myself to citing the statements made by

heel of Italy (starting with Sicily and not Sardinia, as the Americans would have preferred, so as to prevent them from later proposing a relief landing in southern France, which would inevitably have canceled or weakened the continuation of the action against Italy) and that this would entail postponing the opening of the real 'second front' being postponed until 1944, this should not lead us to believe - as Stalin did - that Churchill intended to shift the greatest burden of the war onto the Soviets for as long as possible. Unlike the US, England could not expect to continue to exercise its role as a world power after the war and to have its own global strategy. For Churchill, what mattered most was to contain the future Soviet push into southeastern Europe and to protect England's vital interests and hegemony in the Mediterranean as much as possible. In this logic, *the best thing* for him would have been to get Roosevelt to accept the idea of action in the Balkans as well, alongside that against Italy, cutting off the Soviets' route to the Mediterranean. However, Churchill had no intention of going any further than this. His attitude when the Katyn mass graves were discovered is characteristic in this regard. Being the realist that he was, he did not want to run the risk of jeopardizing the final outcome of the conflict, either by allowing the USSR to weaken too much in the fight against the Germans, which could lead Japan to attack it from behind, or by dramatizing relations with Stalin, whom he did not trust and considered capable of a *renversement des alliances* (and he had news of his peace talks with Germany). - precisely because he did not trust him and considered him capable of a *renversement des alliances* (and had news of his peace overtures to Germany), but understood better than anyone else the murky psychology - he wanted to appear as an open-minded and pragmatic interlocutor, but who negotiated everything on the basis of the real power at his disposal (think of the famous percentages agreed between them in Moscow in October 1944 regarding future influence in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe), so as to prevent Roosevelt — who, having overcome his initial uncertainties, considered collaboration with the USSR in the postwar period to be the cornerstone of his policy — attached great importance to Soviet participation, once the war in Europe was over, in operations against Japan and, more generally, tended not to get overly involved in issues relating to the old continent, which he did not understand.

made on August 28 by First Lord of the Admiralty Alexander at the opening of an exhibition of war photographs. In that speech, which was almost completely ignored by the press, Alexander said: "If Russia receives the means, as I believe it will, to keep the front open until the full potential of aircraft, pilots, ships, and armaments that the Allies can now produce can come to its aid, I am sure that this crucial period we are going through will be the decisive turning point on the road to freedom and victory." (ASMAE, *Political Affairs, Italy*, b. 81, 1942, "Political Reports").

¹ See in particular A. RESIS, *The Churchill-Stalin secret percentages agreement in the Balkans. Moscow October 1944*, in "American Historical Review," April 1978, pp. 368 ff.

the importance - granted Stalin more than he ended up granting him with his "unscrupulous and opportunistic" attitude.

However, the fact that Stalin misjudged the Allies' intentions mattered little or nothing, both because in certain situations appearances often end up being more important than reality, and because of his extremely suspicious character and his realism, for which ideologies had no real importance except in relation to his personal power and Russian national interests, and, finally, because his suspicions towards the Allies, of which they were well aware, constituted a powerful instrument of political pressure on them and, at the same time, represented a sort of guarantee for those to whom he addressed his peace probes (of which Washington and London were to some extent informed by their own secret services) and a green light for them - led by the Japanese - who were counting on a break-up of the coalition.

"anti-fascist" and a separate peace between Germany and the Soviet Union. This explains these peace overtures—partly sincere, dictated by Stalin's suspicions and dissatisfaction with the Anglo-Americans, partly instrumental, aimed at persuading them to commit more to Europe and be more yielding to his demands—and, more generally, the difficulties and lack of clarity that characterized relations between the Allies and the USSR and which, as far as we are directly concerned here, reached their most difficult moment around the time of the Casablanca Conference (January 14-26, 1943), which Stalin refused to attend, citing the impossibility of leaving Russia while the Battle of Stalingrad was underway.

It was immediately clear to everyone that this was an excuse and that, by refusing to meet with Roosevelt and Churchill, Stalin wanted to emphasize his dissatisfaction with their policy and with the decision to make the Mediterranean the center of the Allied military effort, instead of opening a "second front" and bringing the war not to the heart but to the periphery of Hitler's system. A cursory examination of the diplomatic documentation and even of the press of the time, especially the neutral press, but also the Anglo-American press and even that of the Tripartite countries, is enough to realize this.

As we have said, Mussolini began to harbor his first concerns about the progress of the war in the East at the end of 1941, when it became clear that Hitler's plans to settle the score with the Russians before the arrival of winter had failed and that, therefore, everything would, at best, be postponed until the following year, if not until 1943-44. As Göring admitted in his meeting with Mussolini on January 28 at Palazzo Venezia:

the year 1942 presents Germany with the task of liquidating Russia so that this country is eliminated as a dangerous factor of power,

but

However, given the vastness of Russian territory, it might not be possible to reach the Urals even in 1943.

Nor was this opinion held solely by Göring. By January 1942, all the no- Reports and assessments of the progress of operations were in fact unanimous in presenting an increasingly pessimistic picture of the situation: contrary to what Hitler and the OKW had believed, the Soviet army had proved to be a "very powerful military apparatus" with good officers and soldiers who were aware that they were fighting to defend their homeland. despite the enormous losses inflicted on them and the vastness of the occupied territories, in June, when it would have been possible to resume large-scale offensive operations "to finish off these Russians," it would have been necessary—as SS General Sepp Dietrich announced to Alfieri a few days before the "Duce" spoke with Göring—that not only the Germans, but all of Europe" would have to commit itself fully.

At the end of the year, Hitler—as we have already mentioned—taking stock of the situation, wrote to Mussolini that he considered "the total annihilation" of the Russian army "one of the most decisive prerequisites for the definitive victory in this war" and said he was "firmly convinced" that the new

year would bring with it "the definitive collapse of the Bolshevik monster."¹ Four months later, when the two met in Salzburg, the Führer was less drastic:

Bolshevism, he said², will be defeated. The aim is to destroy it as a military power, even if it remains a more or less distant front... Few forces will be needed to defend this front in positions that will be prepared. The whole mass will return to gravitate towards the West, against the Anglo-Saxons. It may be that Great Britain, convinced that it cannot win, will ask to negotiate.

Nevertheless, it does not appear that Mussolini, despite secretly favoring a separate peace, raised the issue: at that point, it must have seemed to him that the only thing to do was to wait for the outcome of the German spring offensive. Nor did he take action in the summer, despite the fact that the Italian-German army in Africa was forced to mark time in front of El Alamein, when it became clear that, although the Germans had achieved remarkable successes, there was no reason for optimism regarding the overall outcome and duration of the war. As Alfieri reported in his reports from Berlin^{a n d}, to some extent, Hitler also hinted at in his letter to Mussolini: everything suggested that, in the best-case scenario, 1943 would also be a year of major operations, which would continue to monopolize ever-increasing forces from Germany and its allies, so that the idea of a massive German commitment in the Mediterranean was unrealistic, given Hitler's determination to resolve the conflict with the Russians first. What prompted Mussolini to raise the issue were the deterioration of the military situation in Africa in November and the increasingly evident difficulties the Germans were encountering in Russia, as well as the comfort he drew from various quarters in his conviction that the only real way out *for everyone* was a separate, compromise peace between Germany and the USSR.

A first significant step in this direction was taken by Alberto Pirelli on his return from a trip to Paris, Brussels, and Berlin, during which he also met with several Swedish and Swiss dignitaries. On November 4, he drafted a report on the European situation and German policy, which he discussed with the Duce two days later. According^{to Pirelli},

a separate peace with Russia is desired by everyone I met in Berlin, but it seems impossible. Stalin has no interest in doing so anyway.

Now a separate peace, while he has at least six months ahead of him in which the German offensive must go into hibernation, except perhaps in some areas of the Caucasus. He certainly prefers to wait and see how things turn out. I have had confirmation of Japan's interest, desire, and attempts to find a solution to the conflict between Russia and Germany, but I believe that only if an attempt to open a second front is made by the Anglo-Americans and fails will it be possible to hope for a separate peace with Stalin.

To which Mussolini replied:

it is essential to make every effort to achieve a separate peace with Russia... However, I believe that Stalin should also want this because he must feel or foresee a shortage of food and raw materials.

A few hours later, while reviewing the progress of operations in Egypt with von Rintelen, he told him: "I would like to express to you personally my impression that we must make a separate peace with Russia as soon as possible."

A second step was taken a month later by General Grazioli, whom Mussolini held in high esteem and considered, since he had led the military mission that witnessed the Red Army's large-scale maneuvers in Belarus in 1934, an expert on Russian affairs, so much so that, as we have already mentioned, on December 2, speaking to the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations and wishing to emphasize in a polemic with the Germans that, unlike them, he had never underestimated "the military power of Russia," he recalled the report that Grazioli had made to him upon his return from the large-scale maneuvers in Belarus. Perhaps encouraged by this mention, on December 5, Grazioli drafted a memorandum in which he argued that, "through its ally Japan," the Axis should "attempt every possible means to achieve a separate compromise peace." Grazioli realized that this would not be easy at first glance. "Beaten but not broken," Russia was not easily resigned to giving up "the rich European lands that the arms of Germany and its allies had wrested from it" and which constituted "the natural springboard for resuming another of Russia's traditional expansionist marches, this time towards the straits and the Mediterranean"; However, its urgent need to "escape the formidable pressure" of Germany and an attitude on the part of the Axis that was not a priori hostile to its compensatory venting towards the Persian Gulf could make it possible. Nor - but on this aspect of the

Grazioli's reminder is worth noting, given that the general's thesis was shared by others and helps explain why many in those circumstances thought of peace and even an agreement with Stalin rather than with the United States and England—ideological differences had to be considered an insurmountable obstacle.

There are differences, in fact, as observed ¹, and they are profound, in the order of "principles"; but in practice, at the point where Stalinist Russia has arrived today, socially speaking, the comparison between the two concepts is much easier than it might appear at first glance.

There is a supremely important common ground that creates an insurmountable divide between the group of fascist-national socialist-Bolshevik regimes and the so-called Anglo-Saxon democratic regime; and that is the constant, sincere, open march of the former towards the people. The lines of march of the fascist and National Socialist regimes stem from origins different from those of the Bolshevik regime, but both aim towards the same social goal: greater justice and greater well-being for the people. The other, the Anglo-Saxon regime and its ilk, stripped of their hypocritical veneer, march in the opposite direction. After all, Bolshevik Russia, despite its abundance of raw materials, can be counted much more among the so-called proletarian states than among the states that are satiated and hoard the riches of the earth... For all these reasons... the ideological differences with Bolshevism seem to me to be practically surmountable, even though each side remains firmly entrenched in its fundamental starting positions.

On December 5, when he spent two and a half hours at Palazzo Venezia with Göring, Mussolini had certainly not yet read Grazioli's memorandum, but from the note he dictated to Ciano² about his conversation with the Reichsmarschall, we know that on that very day, the "Duce" had explicitly addressed the Russian question for the first time with one of the top Nazi leaders. "The number one enemy," he had told him, "is still England"; as for the United States, its industrial potential was such "as to give the Anglo-Saxons air superiority." In this situation, he was convinced

that, one way or another, the chapter of the war against Russia, which no longer serves any purpose, must be closed. If it proves impossible to achieve a second Brest Litovsk (which could be achieved by giving Russia territorial compensation in its Asian zone), it will be necessary to organize a defensive line that will break any enemy initiative using the minimum number of Axis forces.

Göring's subsequent attitude suggests that the Reichsmarschall was of the same opinion as Mussolini; however, knowing Hitler's position, his response was cautious and encouraging at the time

himself: "This," he said, trying to encourage Mussolini to raise the issue directly with the Führer and not compromise himself too much personally, "would be Hitler's ideal." What is certain is that when, two weeks later, C i a n o a n d C a v a l l e r o went t o G ö r l i t z to discuss the situation created by the British counteroffensive in Egypt a n d the Allied landing in French North Africa, a n d to reiterate the urgency of massive German aid to Italy, the first issue Mussolini instructed his son-in-law to raise with Hitler was precisely that of a settlement of the conflict with the USSR.

The note he gave to C i a n o on December 16 is explicit in this regard:

Politics. 1943 Anglo-American effort: Middle East, North Africa, and also the West. If two fronts are not desired, Brest-Litovsk is necessary, if possible; if not, settlement of the eastern front that allows transport t o the West of the maximum number of Axis forces. War against Russia no longer has a purpose (see if Japan's action can be used, directing Russia's ambitions towards Central Asia).

There is extensive Italian and G e r m a n documentation² on the conversations that took place at the Führer's headquarters on December 18-20, which leaves no doubt that C i a n o and C a v a l l e r o had repeatedly tried to promote Mussolini's thesis in various forums (political and military) , as well as on the entirely negative attitude that Hitler (who from the outset had reiterated his certainty that "the problem of the East will be dominated") had shown towards the solution proposed to him by the "Duce." After Hitler's preliminary statements, C i a n o had immediately laid it out in no uncertain terms.

His Excellency C i a n o - as stated in the Italian minutes⁴- points out that he is not tasked with making proposals but only with highlighting the main aspects of the situation as they appear in the Duce's thinking. According to the Duce himself, 1943 will be the year of maximum effort in the East and West.

The Duce considers the problem of the war in Russia and also considers the possibility of a political solution with that country, i.e., reaching a Brest-Litovsk agreement. The aim is to make forces available for the West. If this agreement is not possible, the Duce considers the usefulness of deploying on the Russian front

an economic defensive stance with the aim of making forces available for other sectors.

In this case, Japan could similarly take an interest in persuading Russia to direct its dynamism towards Central Asia.

Faced with this explicit *démarche*, Hitler (who a few days earlier, when von Ribbentrop had apparently also spoken to him about the opportunity to negotiate with Stalin and asked him to contact the Soviet ambassador in Sweden, Mrs. Kollontaj, had flown into a rage at the suggestion that, in exchange for peace, he should "renounce" "most of the territory conquered in the East"¹) in exchange for peace, had replied in a tone that suggested he would have liked to accept it but could not do so because it was unrealistic.

The Führer, according to the Italian minutes, replied that in principle he saw the problem in the same way. In fact, in the winter of 1940-41, he had tried to steer Russian dynamism in this direction and, to this end, had invited Molotov to Berlin. But the Russians had asked to finish off Finland, establish a stable foothold on both sides of the Dardanelles, maintain Russian garrisons in Bulgaria, and had also asked Germany to withdraw its guarantee to Romania, which would have made the Russians masters of Romanian oil in a matter of months.

Then, after von Ribbentrop and Göring had hastened to agree with him, he had endeavored to bury it by denying any value to the Japanese intermediary and reiterating the arguments on the basis of which he considered it unrealistic. He did so by referring to his previous mention of the attempts in 1940-41 to divert Russia towards Central Asia, which Stalin had abandoned, being much more interested in expansion in the Baltic and the Mediterranean, and denying that it was possible to repeat them now:

A year ago, Japan asked him whether Germany would, under certain conditions, enter into an agreement with Russia. It later emerged that the initiative was not Japanese but Russian, with the sole aim of inducing England and America to negotiate with Russia and come to its aid. If today, through an armistice, Russia were given six months to reorganize, we would then be faced with an enemy against whom we would have to defend ourselves once again.

Finding a line that ensures both us and the Russians the necessary food supplies, raw materials, oil, etc. is impossible. On the other hand, Italy and other European nations also depend on the possibility of drawing from those sources.

The Russian situation must be difficult, and the looming danger has led the Anglo-Americans to take great risks with convoys bound for Russia or with landing operations in the West to alleviate this situation.

After that, he examined the situation that would have arisen in any case if the Axis no longer had Russia as an adversary:

What more could we do for Rommel? Very little, because the problem is essentially one of transport, and the absence of Russia as an adversary does not make any of these resources available...

As for territorial forces, Germany will never be able to lighten the eastern front because the Russians cannot be relied upon to respect any treaty. See, for example, their attitude toward Finland. They had concluded a Brest-Litovsk-type agreement, but then they used the pretext of being attacked, and everything collapsed.

As for the Americans' attempts to land in the west, the Führer believes that this would be a serious mistake on their part. We have sufficient and effective divisions and solid fortified fronts in the west.

These fronts are just as solid as the West Wall. Starting next March, 160,000 cubic meters more cement per month will be used than was used when the West Wall was built.

As far as the air force is concerned, the units on the eastern front cannot be moved west for six months because the bases need to be prepared. We would also have to abandon the bases in Russia, with the prospect of then spending six to eight months rebuilding them in the event of a resumption of hostilities.

And finally, he ^{concluded}:

If we attempted to reach an agreement with Russia, the Anglo-Americans would do everything in their power to prevent it; moreover, Finland would certainly side with the latter. In essence, the agreement with Russia represents the squaring of the circle. The solution is impossible.

The outcome of the Görlich talks left Mussolini with a bitter taste in his mouth, so much so that on January 29, opening the meeting dedicated to the strengthening of the armed forces, he remained silent on the issue.

Russia very much on the generals; he had not even mentioned the question of a separate peace, limiting himself, on the one hand, to a quick criticism of the Germans for underestimating the potential of the Red Army and, on the other, to an even quicker and more general declaration of confidence "that the Germans will succeed in stabilizing the situation because they have not yet deployed the bulk of their reserves" This does not mean, however, that he had given up on the game, because, on the contrary, the worsening situation in Stalingrad and the news that Alfieri sent from Berlin about the repercussions that the defeat was having in Germany on the home front and on some of the political and military leaders close to Hitler² confirmed his conviction that the fate of the war in general and of Italy in particular was now linked only to an agreement with the Soviet Union. So it is reasonable to believe that if for about two months, until mid-February, he had not made any moves, it was partly because he wanted to be sure of the outcome of the battle at Stalingrad and partly because he had been absorbed by internal problems: the dismissal of Cavallero and his replacement with Ambrosio, the "reshuffle" of the government, etc.

that Hitler would welcome his proposal in a very different way and that he had not had to keep it secret, "talking to many people about possible peace with Russia" and thus raising "some hopes."

The regime's leaders had already been discussing a possible separate peace between Germany and the USSR the previous month and, more importantly, in somewhat official settings. See, for example, ADSS, VII, p. 95, Monsignor Borgongini Duca to

By mid-February, not only had the surrender of what remained of von Paulus's army surrounded at Stalingrad clarified the military situation in Russia, so to speak, but also the situation in Tunisia left no room for hope, while on a more strictly political level, the formula of "unconditional surrender" announced in Casablanca had made Italy's future increasingly uncertain and complicated any possible exit from the conflict. On the domestic front, Mussolini had now completed most of the operations that, as we have seen, he had begun in December, and Bastianini was now at Palazzo Chigi pressing for a clarification of relations with Berlin and, if the Germans continued to turn a deaf ear, for Italy to seek an independent way out of the war. Finally, in order to truly understand the spirit with which Mussolini had taken it upon himself in mid-February to propose peace with Russia to Hitler once again, one cannot underestimate the fact that at this time his feelings towards the Germans, and Hitler in particular, had reached the level of outright hatred: A hatred that even Vitetti, in his unpublished

On the contrary, he was prompted to take on the role of "Mr. X" on other occasions. The collection of typescripts written for radio broadcast (ACS, *Mn. Cultura Popolare*, b. 157, phase. 7, "I cinque minuti del signor X") proves that, even in 1943, he had to at least follow the column closely and contains some texts which, due to their style and the topics covered (relations between the Anglo-Americans and Soviets, Japanese politics and military successes, the internal situation in India), as well as the characteristics of the typewriter used, make it possible to consider this a possibility. This is all the more so given that all the texts attributable to Mussolini (except for one, dated April 20, which can be explained in a certain sense by the exceptional nature of the topic dealt with, the discovery of the Katyn massacre) prior to March 16, 1943, the day on which the Radiocorriere ceased to highlight the column by publishing the framed timetables. Among these texts, one is of particular interest to us, that of February 23 (Mussolini was in Forlì at the time) dedicated to a "dry communiqué" from the Tass Agency that "denied... reports from Anglo-American sources that the Germans had withdrawn several divisions from the Russian front to send them to France and Africa, thus facilitating the Soviet strategy," reaffirming "that the Red Army is bearing the entire burden of the war" and that "Russia has not forgotten the unfulfilled promises to create a second front in Europe" and, finally, and this was the point that "Mr. X" most wanted to emphasize, "that it is not willing, either today or tomorrow, to share victory with allies who have not earned it."

The crescendo of Mussolini's anti-German outbursts from the summer of 1942 onwards is attested to by a rich series of testimonies. Among the most significant for its underlying political implications is that of G. CIANO, *Diario* cit., p. 604, which refers to the sudden question asked of him on November 6, 1942, by his father-in-law, who wanted to know if he always kept his diary in order, adding that it would "serve to document how the Germans in the military and political fields have always acted without [our] knowledge."

Another "testimony," of a completely different nature but no less significant from a psychological point of view, is the presence among the preparatory materials for *Storia di un anno* (ACS, B. MUSSOLINI, *Autografi memorie*, b. 1) of a report ("Dopo Jena") by Professor Carlo Antoni of the Italian Institute of Germanic Studies, which Mussolini must have requested in July 1943, probably in order to have some controversial historical references with which to counter the accusations made by the Germans regarding the behavior of the Sicilian army and population during the operations that followed the Allied landing and which, perhaps, he then thought for a moment of using in *Storia di un anno*. The report reconstructed (on the basis of "German authors, or rather, Prussian authors, primarily Treitschke"), with the implicit but transparent intention of demonstrating how, in the face of the defeats inflicted on them by Napoleon, the Prussians had behaved no differently from the Italians in Sicily, the repercussions that Auerstädt and Jena had had at all levels. Antoni wrote:

"The defeat at Auerstädt and Jena was due to obvious tactical errors on the part of the Prussian command. However, it is undeniable that, since some advantage had been gained, defeat could have been avoided if the Prussian army had shown the tenacity, calm, and spirit of sacrifice that it had amply demonstrated

book on July 25 and September 1 recognizes this as real, not superficial, and summarizes it in a page of rare effectiveness, even where his hostility toward Mussolini prevents him from judging realistically. Settlement of the "Duce":

In the spring of 1943, his greatest hatred was directed at the Germans; the Germans who, in 1939, had deceived him, promising peace through an alliance, and had suddenly left him facing war; the Germans who had pushed him into intervention in 1940 with the mirage of immediate peace, and had failed to persuade the British to capitulate; the Germans who, in 1941, had attacked Russia promising to destroy it within ten weeks, and were now retreating in confusion under the pressure of the victorious Soviet arms; the Germans who, in 1942, had ruled out the possibility of an Anglo-American landing in Africa, and now, with the collapse of Tunis, their last foothold in Africa, were exposing Italy, helpless and defenseless, to attack by its enemies. Those who, at that time, were close to Mussolini—very few, in truth, since by then everyone was trying to keep their distance from Palazzo Venezia—were well aware of the Duce's feelings toward his "great friend and ally," the Führer; and those who

trials in moments of good fortune. Flee from battle in all directions except the right one, that of Berlin. Treitschke recounts: "When, in the fast-approaching autumn evening, the retreat to Weimar began, the last moral bonds that held the army together were broken. Deaf to the warnings of their unpopular leaders, the soldiers thought only of themselves." Even the troops who had not been engaged in battle were seized by panic. They abandoned their flags en masse. Soldiers exhausted by hunger and fatigue threw themselves into houses and fields in search of food... Hundreds fled to their homes... But even the old, seasoned generals lost heart completely. Prince Hohenlohe capitulated with only 1,000 men because Murat had led him to believe that he was about to be surrounded...

The army in the field was supported by fortresses. These were well-equipped strongholds, rich in artillery and provisions. They were commanded by old generals from Frederick's army. Magdeburg, with 24,000 men and 600 cannons, surrendered without a fight. Stettin, with 5,000 well-armed men, capitulated to 800 Frenchmen with two cannons. Küstrin surrendered to three French companies. Erfurt, Spandau, Hameln, and then the Silesian fortresses fell, it was said, "at the invitation of a trumpeter."

The fall was not limited to the army. It spread to the administration. The Governor of Berlin, Count von der Schulenburg-Kernert, published a manifesto recommending calm as the first civic duty. He then abandoned his post without waiting for the King's order. Seven ministers of the Prussian crown hastened to swear allegiance to Napoleon, followed by the bureaucracy and the clergy. The authorities resumed their work with scrupulous pedantry, so that the victor could use the government apparatus as his docile instrument.

Some intellectuals set poor examples. Johannes von Müller, the "German Tacitus," historian of ancient Swiss freedoms, celebrated Napoleonic glory in bombastic periods. And Hegel believed he saw the soul of the world when Napoleon crossed Jena, and justified the ruin of old Prussia with the doctrine that spirit always triumphs over dry intellect. Lange, Buchholz, and other leaders of the Berlin Enlightenment celebrated the victory of reason over aristocratic prejudice.

And the people? In the recently annexed provinces, French troops were greeted with jubilation. In Münster, Prussian flags were torn down and French flags were raised amid the cheers of the population. In Hanover, there were scenes of joy at the flight of Prussian officials. But even in Berlin, Napoleon's entry was greeted with signs of favor. Everyone wanted to see him. Moving similarities were discovered between him and old Fritz: in the way he sat on his horse and wore his hat.

Meanwhile, the splendid regiment of Gensdarmes, unarmed, ragged, and half-starved, paraded down Unter den Linden like a herd of cattle, amid the jeers of the mob. At this point, Treitschke says: "There was no shortage of unworthy abjectness; the cowardice that is present in every people appeared here more repugnant than elsewhere, because the lack of formality of the Germans is not capable, like the more refined education of the Latins, of maintaining external composure in the midst of vulgarity"...

In short, for the first time in Prussian history, misfortune was accompanied by shame. The spell of Frederick's invincibility had been broken, and with it the entire edifice of old Prussia had collapsed. No social class or group proved equal to the gravity of the moment. Ultimately, no one proved capable of understanding the misfortune, let alone assessing it. If the troops, indifferent, had

They did not know him or were still under the influence of Mussolini's legend. Finding him so irritated with the Germans, so sharp in his examination of some fundamental errors committed by Germany, and so agreeable to every criticism they made of German policy, they became convinced that he was eager to seek a solution and even to break away from Hitler and end the war. This was as true as the opposite, because, in reality, he had no plan, nor was he capable of conceiving one. He was agitated by inconsistent passions, uncertain and changeable as he had always been, under the influence of pure feelings, fragmentary news, and often insignificant facts, which now encouraged him and now frightened him: and it was, as I said above, now resistance to the bitter end, now a compromise peace, now even the breaking of the alliance.

After what has already been said in the previous volume about his fear of the Germans—a fear that dated back to the First World War, so much so that it could even be described as atavistic—and, in this volume, about Italian-German relations during the three years of the Second World War that we are dealing with, there is certainly no need to dwell on Mussolini's hatred of the Germans, as it is easy to understand and date around three specific moments: when it began to take shape in the first half of 1941, when it assumed a stable role and growing influence over the 'Duce' in the summer of 1942, and when it reached its peak the following year. It is necessary, however, to dwell on his hatred for Hitler, both because, despite obviously having a number of points in common with the other, it had its own peculiarities, and because Mussolini's position on Hitler, on what he thought of him as a man and as a political leader, has never been clarified, so that one might be tempted to consider it only the result of disappointment, resentment, and humiliation - which were undoubtedly present to some extent in Mussolini's hatred of Hitler, but were not the decisive factor - caused by having to acknowledge that the 'pupil' did not listen to the 'master' at all and, on the contrary, chastised him and treated him like any other allied head of government, and sometimes even worse!

Unlike Hitler, Mussolini never had any personal esteem for the Führer, nor did he feel any friendship or even human sympathy toward him. He long opposed Hitler's attitude of "deference

personal esteem for the Führer, nor did he feel any friendship or even human sympathy towards him. For a long time, he countered Hitler's "deferential, sometimes almost servile, never ^{confidential}" attitude towards him with a casual behavior that, all in all, denoted a sense of superiority that only late and with great difficulty would the German dictator allow himself to display. Statements such as that according to Prince Urach Mussolini was, according to Hitler, "the only

his true friend, the only man with whom he felt he could speak openly, certain that he would be understood even in his most hidden intentions" or the one preserved in *the Testament* (in which, as we have already said, Hitler would have reiterated his "personal affection for the Duce"), according to which "personally" the "Duce" equaled him, would be incredible in Mussolini's mouth or under his pen.

As he apparently said in the Grand Council after their first meeting in June 1934, what had struck him about Hitler was essentially his *determination*, his will to put his ideas into practice. From this point of view, Hitler was anything but mediocre.

regardless of *Mein Kampf*, I cannot tell you what and how many ideas Hitler has, but I can assure you that those expressed in our conversations are very clear and he is determined to put them into practice.

If, contrary to what many thought, Hitler did not strike him as mediocre at all, from that first meeting what had struck him most was his *lucid fanaticism*, "an infinite fury of logic, and an infinite search for a body, for an original and ferocious blood, beyond reason" which bordered on doctrinarism and manifested itself in forms of outright hysteria. These were flaws and aberrations that did not prevent Mussolini *the politician* from giving credence for years, despite a series of evidence to the contrary, to Hitler's declarations of moderation and realism, but which made him impervious to any feeling of friendship or even human sympathy towards him. If we add to this a series of other reasons, character-related, cultural, even ideological (worldview, so to speak), it seems to us that Suvich, in his memoirs, best captured the real relationship between the two men:

The friction that later characterized Italian-German relations had been present from the outset; other reasons emerged later.

At the root of it all was the difference in character, mentality, and ethical-cultural nature of the two protagonists: one Latin and Catholic, the other—although born in Austria—Prussian and pagan; one practical and pragmatic, the other abstract and fanatical. This difference was also reflected in the mutual attitude of the two men; Mussolini did not sympathize with Hitler: first he tried to guide him, then he opposed him, and then he submitted to him (but by then I was no longer in the circle). Hitler believed that his meeting with Mussolini was a fateful event that would turn the world upside down, and he believed in the principle of friendship that bound him to Mussolini (I say principle and not sentiment, because I do not know if Hitler was capable of sentiment) and remained faithful to him even in adversity: the "deutsche Treue" (German loyalty). Mussolini always considered Hitler abnormal and the proclaimed principle of a-

The friendship between the two men bothered him. I did not follow these relations in the years following my presence at the Foreign Ministry, but I would not be surprised if Mussolini, even in his impotence, when he had to entrust himself body and soul to the other, hated him.

Feelings toward each other's regimes varied: Hitler did not seem to have any regard for fascism as an expression of the Italian people, of whom he had a very low opinion; he considered it merely an expression of Mussolini's political ideology. Mussolini derided Hitler's ideology, but he exploited Nazism for his own ends as long as he could, and when he became Hitler's subordinate, it was not because of the man's personality or ideology, but because of the impressive and grandiose picture of military organization that had been presented to him in Germany.

Perhaps it could be said that Hitler created his politics based on ideology, while Mussolini adapted ideology to the needs of politics.

Another element of incompatibility between the two movements was Hitler's poor opinion of the Italian people, despite his statements to the contrary; this is also evident in *Mein Kampf*. In fact, Hitler had even greater respect for Mussolini because he had managed to achieve what he had done with a people as undisciplined, skeptical, and lacking in national solidarity as the Italian people. Although this remained in the background, it was certainly not an assessment that Mussolini could accept.

There are various statements on this page by Suvich that deserve to be taken up and developed. In order not to digress too much or anticipate issues that we will deal with extensively in the next volume (in particular, the place that Mussolini's personal attitude towards Catholicism as a religious fact had in his personality), we will limit ourselves to the two that we believe most directly help us to better understand The Duce's compromise with Hitler, his hatred for him, and, at the same time, his choice of enemy with whom to make peace. In fact, as we shall see, this choice was only partly dictated by Mussolini's desire to find a way out of the dramatic situation in which Italy and his regime found themselves; on the other hand, it responded to a logic that was also ideological, like Hitler's, but based on different, even antithetical premises compared to those of Hitler.

The first statement, which not coincidentally precedes the other in Suvich's summary of the relationship between the two regimes and their leaders, concerns the largely critical judgment that each of them had of the other's regime.

To say that Mussolini *mocked* Hitler's ideology and therefore judged negatively the type of regime that the Führer and his collaborators had built is too drastic a statement and probably reflects to some extent the private and public reactions of the "Duce" to *the* attempted Nazi *putsch* in Austria in 1934, which Suvich had experienced in very close contact with Mussolini. If we can speak of derision, it is only with regard to Hitler's doctrinarism, his reporting a n d reducing problems and the reality of politics to what was written in *Mein Kampf*. That said, it must also be said that, despite the many common aspects, Mussolini never identified fascism with National Socialism. His occasional public statements, a n d even more so those of certain sectors of fascism, especially the intransigent ones, on the common destiny of the two peoples and the two revolutions and on the communion of the two regimes, should not be misleading. That Mussolini was convinced even before Hitler came to power that there were profound differences between fascism a n d National Socialism a n d that the latter was merely an imitation of the former is indirectly confirmed by the caution with which he acted when, after the elections of September 1930, the possibility of Hitler coming to power became more substantial. Nor was his conviction shaken by the first steps taken by the National Socialist regime in 1933-36, which, on the contrary, confirmed it. Among the various pieces of evidence that could be cited, one significant example is an article, *Fato delle rivoluzioni* (The Fate of Revolutions), which he wrote for *Il popolo d'Italia* between February and June 1935, probably between the end of 1934 and the beginning of 1935, but w h i c h was not published at the last minute, when it was already in draft form.

Important for understanding what Mussolini considered a revolution and the historical and cultural references (Cromwell, Washington, and the French Revolution

¹ In 1941-43, the most uncritical admirers of the validity of the National Socialist model were sometimes intellectuals who, at the beginning of fascism and even in the early years after it came to power, had been in stark opposition to it and only aligned themselves with it once the regime was established. See, for example, G. C. BARA VELLI [M. MISSIROU], *Dieci anni di nazionalsocialismo (Ten Years of National Socialism)*, Rome 1942. For Missiroli's publishing activities during this period, see ACS, *Min. della Cultura Popolare (Ministry of Popular Culture)*, *Gabinetto (Cabinet)*,

cese) that formed the basis of his idea of revolution and the *modus operandi* that theoretically inspired his "management" of the men who had made the "revolution"¹, Particelo reveals a clear concern to establish a clear distinction between the "fascist revolution" and other revolutions, in practice, given the moment, between the fascist and the National Socialist revolutions. For Mussolini, all revolutions had a common moral starting point and constituted an "accelerated period" in the evolution of peoples, "a time of high tension in their history."

At a certain point in the life of a people, an antithesis may arise between the institutions that govern it and new trends and needs. Revolution heals the discord and restores balance, modifying or eliminating outdated institutions and creating new ones.

¹ As far as the revolutionary process is concerned, it is clear from the article that Mussolini's idea of it was essentially based on the events of the French Revolution. As for the post-revolutionary period, what we have defined as the "management" of the men who had made the revolution, Mussolini identified among them a series of categories that could undermine, divert, or corrupt the victorious revolution and indicated how it should behave towards them. "First of all," he wrote, "there was the category of those who are intemperate by nature or by education: these people are absolutely necessary in the insurrection, but they may become less necessary once the insurrection is over. Their merits must be recognized, they must be helped financially, or they must be assigned tasks that correspond to their mentality and sensibility. Then there are the so-called profiteers, who are the most harmful to the development of a revolution: that is, individuals who consider the revolution as a business from which they must derive tangible advantages. This phenomenon is also inevitable, as it is inherent in human nature, which creates few heroes and very few saints; but even if it is inevitable, it must be dealt with harshly. And that is what I have done over the past ten years. Every abuse, every illicit gain, every contamination of the sacred with the profane, has been severely punished by me..."

Other categories that accompany every revolution are those of the nostalgic and the disappointed; categories infinitely less dangerous than the previous ones. Even the Italian Risorgimento—which was a revolution—had its disappointed followers towards the end: those who would have preferred a federation of regions to the centralized unity of the desired state (and they were profoundly wrong) and those who would have preferred a republic to a monarchy (they too were wrong, as subsequent events proved). The fascist revolution did not have this procession of disappointed and nostalgic people, because it was entrusted above all to young people who cannot be nostalgic for a past they do not know or disappointed with a present they can build. Extremists can compromise the development of a revolution by dividing forces and provoking dangerous reactions. Even revolution has its own timing. That is why illegalism, when the revolution has created a new order, is extremely dangerous. Since October 1922, I have fought against illegalism, even though I knew that illegalism cannot disappear overnight. It takes some time before the raging waters return to the bed of the new legality... Finally, during a revolution, there is a danger represented by optimism. Woe to the leader who indulges others, or, worse still, himself! One must reject laurels if there is a risk of falling asleep on them! The leader of a revolution must march at the head of his army. He must be, as I said before, the leader who goes ahead. Otherwise, he will be dragged along and lose all possibility of controlling the forces. If I am at the forefront, I will have my followers in my hands, I will be able to slow them down or speed them up. Two men who created a revolution adhered to this system, from the beginning to victory and until their death: I am talking about Oliver Cromwell and George Washington. The thing that distinguishes revolutions is the wear and tear on men. It has been said that revolutions swallow their men: this is partly true, although the judgment always refers to the French Revolution and the factions that led to the mutual massacre of the Girondins, Jacobins, and Conventionalists. But when a revolution such as the Fascist one avoids factions, maintains its unitary and totalitarian character with an iron fist, and submits with rigid discipline to the hierarchies desired by the leader of the revolution, the wear and tear on men is infinitely less. If I go back to 1922 and look around me today, I find that my lieutenants are still largely the same. Some have fallen, others have suffered an eclipse with a high probability of return, but the vast majority are still under my command and in the service of the State. The inevitable gaps are filled by the contribution of the new generations, who, unaware of any previous political experience, are beginning their own in fascism.

In this sense, even the electoral battles that had brought Hitler to power were to be considered, like the Italian interventionist demonstrations of May 1915, "insurrections of a moral order," the first act of a revolutionary process. After this single reference to National Socialism, the article made no further mention of Hitler's "revolution," except indirectly in the closing paragraph, when Mussolini c l a i m e d the substantial uniqueness of fascism and thus distanced himself from *all* other revolutions:

E. Nolte, in his recent *National Socialism and Bolshevism*, argues that Hitler's racism and anti-Semitism stemmed from his anti-Bolshevism, but this is of little relevance here. What matters is that, in both cases, Hitler was motivated by an exclusively ideological conviction which, as Nolte rightly pointed out, while it may have left him some "casual" leeway in choosing the moment to launch the attack, nevertheless gave the destruction of the USSR, and therefore the war against it, the character of a "necessity," the "authentic task" that he had to accomplish. But this is not enough. For if Hitler's policy on the Russian question was determined by the hard core of Hitlerian ideology, what drove Mussolini to try to convince the Führer of the need to address it in terms of political realism was not only his pragmatism and the fact that he felt the water rising to his throat, but also something else, which, while not to be overestimated, should not be - especially in a biography - underestimated.

In the second chapter, we discussed how Mussolini had seen and essentially accepted Hitler's decision to attack the Soviet Union. Apart from the fact that Mussolini, dazzled by German military power and together, misled by the dual conviction that the Soviet army was incapable (as demonstrated by its painful display of inefficiency in the war against Finland) of withstanding the German onslaught and that the disastrous failures encountered by those who, like Napoleon, had attacked Russia in the past were no longer possible now that 'space' had been 'conquered by the engines of tanks and aircraft'², he was sure that the war in the East would be short (although less easy than the Germans believed, which, however, on the whole, did not displease Mussolini too much, because he thought that losing a few 'feathers' in Russia would reduce their arrogance towards Italy a little). The most positive thing he had seen in it was that, in his opinion, the defeat of the USSR

- depriving England of the only card it could hope to play in Europe and securing the sympathy of anti-Bolshevik circles in England and America for the Axis - would pave the way for a general compromise peace. From the outset, therefore, Mussolini had acted according to a purely political logic, in which ideology played only an instrumental role, serving to cover and relaunch the image of fascism as the first political force to oppose Bolshevism. He did not subsequently deviate from this logic, as evidenced by the fact that, as soon as he realized that victory over the Soviets would not be quick and that, even if they were ultimately defeated, the Eastern Front would devour

a significant part of Germany's energy and war potential, and that in the meantime Hitler was unwilling to provide Italy with any aid other than that strictly necessary to prevent its collapse, much less to make the Mediterranean the center of the war, he had begun to consider it essential to end the conflict in the east.

Clinging to this perspective and making it the focus of his political action on Hitler, he was not, however, motivated solely by his realism and pragmatism. That these were at the root of his thinking is beyond question; nevertheless, if we want to fully understand all aspects of Mussolini's position on the issue of peace with the USSR, one must also consider another component of it, secondary to the situation in which Italy found itself and which the "Duce" hoped to resolve by inducing Hitler to come to an agreement with Stalin, but not irrelevant from a biographical point of view and which makes it clear how much Mussolini was, despite everything, a child of the century of great ideologies and the myths that they, directly or indirectly, fueled.

Hitler considered Stalin "a giant," "one of the most extraordinary figures in world history." He admired him, on the one hand, for his harshness and ruthlessness in pursuing his own policies and strengthening his personal power to the maximum, turning a people incapable of creating anything and, above all, an organized state, a real force that could have conquered the world (Russia, he once said to a group of his collaborators, was that gigantic empire because at its head was a man with an iron fist "who can afford to say: 'Does the loss of thirteen million men seem like a great sacrifice when it comes to realizing a great idea?'"), and on the other hand, the ruthlessness in using Bolshevism and internationalism to achieve what, since Peter the Great, had been the historical objectives of tsarism. Even Mussolini—who had always been a keen observer of Soviet affairs and had devoted several comments to them in *Il Popolo d'Italia* in the 1930s—had spoken in praise of Stalin on several occasions and had described Stalin's policy as not only continuing that of the tsars, but also Europeanizing Russia and forming its national cultural unity. On closer inspection, his position on the possibility of a natural transformation of

Bolshevism in its Stalinist version (because, despite his human sympathy for Trotsky, he had always been convinced that it was the only one that could modernize Russia and give rise to a new form of culture) had been cautious on the whole, as had his judgments on the power and modernity of the USSR, which Hitler had long underestimated. Nor should we be misled by some of his statements, such as this one:

When the Germans were thirty kilometers from Moscow, he said on January 3, 1943,ⁱⁿthe Directorate¹, there were many people in Moscow with their pants in their hands, and Stalin had them all shot: between ten and fifteen thousand. All those who trembled, who whispered... A few days ago, the Bolshevik garrison in Moscow issued an order that read as follows: "All officers of units that have lost a flag will be referred to the military tribunal"...

In fact, they were dictated not so much by a conscious acceptance of Stalinist terrorist systems as by disappointment and irritation at the crisis on the "home front" and the lack of fighting spirit among the military command, as well as frustration at his own inability to contain them.

After what we said in the previous chapter about the erosion of the "internal front," the gradual loss of confidence in the regime and the distancing of increasingly large sectors of the bourgeoisie, economic circles, and the old ruling class, there is certainly no need to dwell on this state of mind or how it manifested itself. However, it is worth drawing the reader's attention to one aspect of it: the fact that it did not merely radicalize Mussolini's anti-bourgeois sentiment, but also led his "moral" polemic against the "spirit" of the bourgeoisie to take on characteristics that were, on the one hand, marked by a sort of distrustful and irritated anti-capitalism and, on the other, to a populism in which there were reminiscences and regurgitations of his youthful revolutionary socialism, and even of his early anarcho-syndicalist formation, and which was influenced to some extent by the positions and polemics of the 'new fascism' and of the young fascists committed to claiming a 'new society'.

they gave to Rome, establishing cordial relations with some of them. A typical example is that of V. Potemkin, to whom he also gave a photograph of himself with a dedication, which Potemkin, after moving from Rome to Paris, continued to keep on his desk as a sign of his personal esteem for the "Duce" and his consideration for the Fascist regime. See, in this regard, the interview given to M. J. Champel in the Paris-Midi of March 30, 1935, in which Potemkin not only spoke very flatteringly about Mussolini, but, after briefly mentioning the "diversity" of the "methods" of the two regimes, he essentially emphasized the fact that, faced with "an old world collapsing on all sides," it was up to everyone to rebuild it "in their own way, but to rebuild it at any cost." As evidenced by a recent testimony from a Soviet diplomat, Sergei Slipchenko, during these contacts Mussolini sometimes also asked for "confidential" information, i.e., information not related to bilateral and international issues in general. "For example," Slipchenko testified, "he asked Stalin to send him the script of the demonstrations held in Red Square on May 1 and November 7. Stalin sent it to him, and Mussolini copied these demonstrations" (see *Veterans speak of the Diplomatic*

as well as the suggestions of positions at the Ferrara conference (and, perhaps, of *the Revolutionary War*) or, without going back so far, to Cianetti,^{Venturi} and perhaps Gentile's *Genesis and Structure of Society* (which Mussolini must have known in some of its general theses, having been briefly introduced to them by Gentile himself). Significant is the insistence with which, during this period, he began to speak of the "civilization of wages" as opposed to the "civilization of profit" with some of his

¹ In 1942 and especially in 1943, Mussolini had frequent dealings with Augusto Venturi that did not only concern the latter's institutional duties as secretary of the Interministerial Committee for Supplies and Price Control (for which see ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ord. (1922-1943)*, file 530746), but also took on a more political and personal character, so much so that in April 1943, when Cianetti was being discussed as a possible successor to Vidussoni, Venturi was mentioned as a possible Minister of Corporations.

² For the latest developments in Gentile's position, see A. J. GREGOR, *L'ideologia del fascismo*, Milan 1974, pp. 285 ff.; U. SPIRITO, *Giovanni Gentile e il socialismo*, in *Dall'attualismo al problematicismo*, Florence 1976, pp. 109 ff.; S. NATOLI, *Giovanni Gentile filosofo europeo*, Turin 1989, pp. 77 ff.; A. DEL NOCE, *Giovanni Gentile. Per una interpretazione filosofica della storia contemporanea (Giovanni Gentile: Towards a Philosophical Interpretation of Contemporary History)*, Bologna 1990.

⁵ The problem of the "civilization of profit" versus the "civilization of work" was the subject of numerous public and ideological statements during the war years, but it was also addressed by prominent scholars.

One type of discussion, essentially journalistic, was devoted to the "gold-labor" problem and thus to the theoretical construction of a new economy based on the combination of *labor* and *sociality* rather than on *gold and profit*. In some articles, this issue was linked to the theme of revolutionary war. See, for example, E. D' AQUANNOI, *Sangue e oro (Blood and Gold)*, in

collaborators and with De Bagnac, with whom, looking back on the various moments of his life, he sometimes indulged in reflections on the present, on the balance sheet of twenty years of government that he was drawing up *in his inner homine*, and on his ideas about the future of fascism and, more generally, of the society that would emerge from the war. We will discuss all this in greater detail in the next volume; for the moment, and with reference to the issue we are now dealing with, what has been said seems sufficient to establish a direct link between these first manifestations, between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, of a 'return to the left' by Mussolini and his insistence - as long as he was able - on rejecting the idea of a separate peace with the Anglo-Americans and instead pursuing a settlement of the conflict with the Soviets. It would be too simplistic to reduce the issue to a sort of grudge against England because it was not willing to facilitate an extreme "turnaround" for Italy, or to an attempt to save himself personally, given that the Anglo-Americans had established the principle of unconditional surrender and declared that they would never negotiate with him, while more than one person thought that Stalin had no at least towards Mussolini, prejudices re-guide. . .

In fact, the issue is more complex. On the one hand, Mussolini's position was influenced, as has been said and repeated, by the hope that, by ending the conflict with the USSR, the Tripartite Pact could still resolve the war to its advantage or, at least, negotiate a general compromise peace. These were two solutions in which a whole series of obstacles (the ideological nature of the war for Churchill and Roosevelt, the fact that, unlike Stalin, they could not take initiatives that went against the mood and ideals of their peoples, the presence among the Tripartite partners of Japan, which, especially for the Americans, was the main enemy, etc.) made it impossible to hope that they could be achieved on the Anglo-American side. And that, in any case, they would not have solved the problem of Mussolini, who was now reduced to a minimum margin of survival. On the other hand, however, the position of the 'Duce' was also conditioned by a prejudice that can well be defined as ideological.

To say that Mussolini was influenced by his "return to the left"

fitto), but rather by a concept of solidarity and family in the workplace. Still in the context of general statements, see the section edited by G. Calendoli, "Il lavoro" by *Ventanni*, Rome 1942, II, pp. 5-18. Finally, for Catholic journalism, see G. MENEGAZZI,

It would be wrong to give up his anti-Bolshevism. However, it is almost certain that at that moment, forced to make a choice, he felt less hostility towards an agreement with the USSR than with England and the United States. And not so much, mind you, because his previous relations with their governments, particularly with the British, made it psychologically difficult and humiliating for him to accept such an idea, which his realism would certainly not have prevented him from doing in those circumstances, but because, a choice in this direction went against a series of ideological prejudices that he could not shake off even at such a decisive moment, so deeply rooted were they in him.

Ugo Spirito, in the aforementioned essay from mid-1943, ^{the destination} of which we do not know, stated: "Today, after more than twenty years of existence, fascism still finds itself facing Bolshevism, but it also finds itself, and more directly, engaged against democracy; we would say, between East and West." From this "observation," the philosopher launched into a series of vague considerations on the historical significance and *victory*, even in the event of military defeat, of fascism, which Mussolini certainly did not share, while agreeing in general with what Spirito stated in the introduction. We say in general because, while his opposition to Bolshevism had not fundamentally changed, nor did he believe in the possibility of its transformation and humanization, his opposition to democracy and capitalism had become considerably more radical.

On June 15, 1927, Mussolini, thanking Henry Massis for sending him his *La défense de l'Occident*, ^{wrote} to him:

... the East is a clanger. If you like, an infection. But through what channels does this infection spread? Here they are: liberalism, democracy, socialism, freemasonry. The organism of the West is weakened, debilitated, by these ideologies. However, there is only one movement at present that has the courage—having the power of a great nation—to be fundamentally, openly, fiercely anti-liberal, anti-democratic, anti-socialist, anti-

the 1930s on "Rome or Moscow" and even on "Rome and Moscow" referring to the relationship between fascism and democracy would not have nipped them in the bud, but prevented them *a priori* as inconceivable for fascists and, personally, he would never have admitted that there could be a relationship between fascism and democracy - as he had done when talking to ^{Ludwig!} about the relationship between fascist Italy and Bolshevik Russia - something similar ("we are, as in Russia, for the collective meaning of life"). "In all their negative aspects," fascism and Bolshevism were in fact similar: "we and the Russians are against liberals, democrats, and parliament" For Mussolini, there was nothing similar between fascism and democracy, nor could there be, but only a clear and total opposition. Nor was his aversion to democracy solely political. For the "Duce," it was in fact fueled by a series of ideological motivations that we have already discussed in previous volumes, so it is sufficient here to recall them only briefly.

Psychologically and culturally, the central component of Mussolini's anti-democratic stance had gradually become increasingly clear in anti-capitalism. Already strong in previous years, during the war it had grown stronger and expanded: Mussolini had practically moved from hostility towards "super-capitalism" to hostility towards capitalism *tout court*, to the extent that he was accused by men such as Grandi, Ciano, and Volpi of "white" or "black" Bolshevism, depending on the case. Closely connected to his anti-capitalism were, as we have seen, anti-urbanism and the fight against declining birth rates and for demographic growth, which, in his view, was the foundation of the power and morality of peoples.

"young people" and that capitalist society, which characterized those now "old," exhausted, and corrupt, was no longer able to provide security, with all the negative consequences that the "Duce" attributed to this; just as, by now, neither was the bourgeoisie, which was increasingly proving to be the product of capitalism, democracy, and their morals—even if it could proclaim itself and even feel politically fascist. From this perspective, the "great democracies," France, England, and the United States, constituted the synthesis of all the moral failures of capitalism and the projection of its power and internationalism (and, therefore, anti-Europeanism and anti-Westernism) onto the world political stage. The war against them became the struggle of the 'young' peoples, bearers of a new and superior morality, with

the "old" ones, the "proletarian nations" against the "plutocracies," the expression of the "blessed landowners," of "blood" against "gold." And this was especially true of the United States, which in Mussolini's eyes, on the one hand, was the quintessence of capitalism, the most rapacious and morally unscrupulous (even towards its ally, England, which it was systematically undermining from its main positions of power) and at the same time the most corrupt and corrupting, hypocritical and arrogant (and boastful), convinced that it could afford anything, overcome any difficulty, and have its behavior accepted by virtue of the power of its wealth, of its money.

That, especially after World War I, anti-Americanism had deep roots in Italy (but not only in Italy) and extended well beyond the strictly fascist milieu is a ^{fact}; however, Mussolini's anti-Americanism had not only become particularly heated, but in recent years had been charged with a whole series of motivations.

"moral" values that had made the US and Roosevelt (for whom, moreover, he had initially felt esteem and admiration for his "new state based on the three Rs - reform, relief, and recovery" and the New Deal) the most hated enemy; despised and feared at the same time, on closer inspection, much more than England and Churchill, who, despite everything, the

The "Duce" still considered it to be, to some extent, an expression of European civilization and not, as he believed the United States to be, the product of a crude and primitive civilization that had nothing in common with Europe except its most deteriorated aspects, the result of its crisis, and whose administration had no awareness of being a true state, but identified itself historically with the commercial and industrial class, whose particular interests it expressed and interpreted in the most narrow and exclusive sense.

In 1942, Edgardo ^{Sulis2} compiled a selection of Mussolini's writings under the title *Mussolini contro il mito di Demos (Mussolini against the myth of Demos)*, which provides significant documentation on the anti-democratic nature of the "Duce" and offers a glimpse into the final stages of his position. Sulis had in fact prefaced the collection with a preface that explained some of the issues raised in the passages collected, all of which predated the outbreak of the war (during which Mussolini

He had almost never publicly dwelled on them, and when he did, it was always in a very summary and generic way. They were only sketched out, and Mussolini had gradually refined them in his mind in 1941-42. According to Sulis, Mussolini was "the first man in the world" to have put into proper terms both, in general, the criticism of democracy and, in particular, the reasons for the antithesis and irreconcilability between fascism and democracy. But, more importantly for us, he stated that Mussolini, being aware that only "the clash between the two principles, between the old and the desire to create a new one," could clarify and make "complete, obvious, and total," the "intimate essence" of his conception of revolution and, at the same time, his "mission against F89," had been, until the war, "a revolutionary in waiting." In this context, Sulis also made another statement that reveals the character and limits that the "Duce's" anti-Bolshevism had assumed at that time, its subordination and minor importance compared to anti-democraticism, and which helps to understand why Mussolini was also ideologically inclined to consider and advocate peace with the USSR and to reject the idea of peace with the Anglo-Saxons. According to Sulis, in fact, and therefore for Mussolini, who not only approved the choice of passages to be included in the collection but had also read and perhaps discussed its preface: democracy was a reality, a world, a civilization to be overthrown and destroyed; Bolshevism, on the other hand, was only a disease, 'the prodigal son of democracy', which would never become completely independent of it and would never truly rise up against it, and which would fall with it, just as illusions and utopias are destined to fall when the reality that generated them ceases to exist.

Only war, wrote Sulis⁵, uncovered the batteries and pushed Bolshevism back to enemy number two, revealing it, if there was any need, as the prodigal son of democracy. Only today is it known to those who believed Mussolini to be the eternal anti-communist who the true enemy of fascism is, which world to destroy with our revolution. Bolshevism is not a world, it is only a disease, a nation, a party, a remnant of mad demagogic hope, waved over the tragic sunset of the sun of the future... For twenty years and more, Bolshevism has prevented European revolutions from totally identifying democracy with current civilization, modern civilization, contemporary civilization. The bourgeoisie, lazily reclining on the cushions of this civilization, was and is repulsed by such a tremendous identification, which reveals the need to start all over again, *r e n o u n c i n g* all inherited comforts. This bourgeois diaphragm has created the Bolshevik bogeyman and prevented us from seeing clearly into Mussolini's face.

Mussolini is the first, fiercest, strongest anti-democrat to appear on the political scene.

Socialism and communism can at best make him smile, because however tenacious the illusions of poverty and the mirage of the land of plenty may be, the seductions of the bourgeoisie are much stronger and more real, and the desires of the proletariat that turns to them are more real and powerful. Between illusion and reality, the former falls by itself, the latter must be brought down by force.

Now, if twenty years and more of post-war Europe were dominated by a single anti-Bolshevik concern, culminating in the Anti-Comintern Pact, this does not mean that Mussolini's ideal line was in any way compromised by the circumstances. Leafing through his writings, as I did, I discovered, not so much for myself as for those obsessed with anti-Bolshevism, an entire uninterrupted anti-democratic thread, decisive, sometimes explicit to the point of being gravestone-like, violent and indisputable to the point of absoluteness.

Because this is Mussolini's ideal opposition to an entire civilization. He is the first founder of the new civilization, because this is his promise to demolish an entire world that has been weighing down the march toward the future for twenty years. Either we will overturn this world, or we will be crushed by it forever.

In light of what we have said, it is understandable why, even from an ideological point of view, Mussolini considered Hitler's refusal to consider the need to come to an agreement with Stalin politically and militarily suicidal and likely to cause the Axis to lose the war, as well as ideologically inconsistent, the result of a fanatical blind spot that made it impossible for him to realistically assess who the most dangerous enemies were and against whom to concentrate all forces. For if the Tripartite had won or a general compromise peace had been reached, the USSR would have been rendered harmless and Bolshevism would either have entered into crisis or evolved towards increasingly *national* forms in the tradition of Great Russian and Tsarist expansionism and, therefore, more dangerous or equally dangerous for the Allies and especially for England, which would have had no choice but to oppose them as it had opposed them in the past and, to some extent, was already trying to oppose them. On one point, perhaps, Mussolini could agree with Hitler: what guarantees were there that, once peace had been made and Stalin had caught his breath thanks to it, he would not take advantage of the transfer of the bulk of German forces to the west to resume hostilities? But even to this argument (and secondarily to the one that it would take months for the forces engaged in the east to be transferred to the west), Mussolini believed he had a ready answer: either Stalin did not really want to negotiate and was using the specter of a separate peace to induce London and Washington to open the "second front" as soon as possible, to provide him with more aid and to be more willing to satisfy his demands for specific commitments on post-war territorial arrangements (all things that Mussolini, at least in broad terms, was well aware of), or whether Hitler and the OKW considered it too risky militarily to trust him and leave the eastern front unguarded, for Mussolini the solution was to renounce any other

offensive action against it, establish a defensive line that was as favorable as possible and stabilize the front, fortifying it if necessary with a sort of "eastern wall" and transferring to the west only a part of the forces currently deployed in Russia, especially the air forces, which, if necessary, could be quickly brought back to the east to counter any Soviet action.

On the evening of November 1, 1942, Mussolini had asked Giorgio Pini, who was about to take his leave at the end of an audience at Palazzo Venezia, an unexpected question: "Tell me, Pini, do you think I am already dead?" Pini was unable to understand whether this "cruel question revealing a sad state of mind" referred to his health or to the political and military situation. Four months later, the Duce's health had improved, but the political and military situation had worsened considerably, and Mussolini was aware of this. He felt the full weight of responsibility as he would say some time later to Ottavio Dinaie for having "deluded himself into thinking he could risk everything to make us great and strong," and he was also convinced that if he did not manage to deal with the situation in some way, it would all be over for him. Significant and, at the same time, characteristic of the allusive manner he used even with the very few people he still trusted and considered capable of understanding his human condition are the words he said to De Begnac during one of the periodic conversations he still had with his biographer during this period:

ti of euphoria and despair, racking his brains, cursing the Germans and that "tragic buffoon" Hitler.

Although he realized that the crisis was reaching breaking point and that moments of despair were becoming more frequent than moments of euphoria, and although he occasionally felt the weight of his human loneliness and perhaps even his personal loneliness (broken only by increasingly rare contact with a few old friends, such as Dinaie and Morgagni, and by business meetings, often more or less brief depending on the person, during which his innate tendency to replace dialogue with monologue became increasingly apparent and led him more and more to go 'off topic' and pursue aloud the ideas that most preoccupied him), everything can be said except that he resigned himself to accepting defeat and gave up looking for a way out. As a "good official," he tried to keep track of everything, listened to his colleagues' points of view, and let Bastianini weave his webs, even though he personally did not believe they would lead to anything positive. However, everything confirmed his belief that the only way out—for Italy, but also for the Axis as a whole—was to end the war in the East or, at least, to suspend offensive operations and stabilize the Eastern Front. Even his most sincere and loyal collaborators, such as Bastianini, although they did not believe that Hitler would accept the request, were unable to contest its theoretical validity and counter it with other more valid ones, and did not feel they could take away his last hope. This was all the more so because rumors, assessments, news, and requests were coming in from all sides, suggesting that the time was right to take decisive action against Hitler and that even among his collaborators, both civilian and military, there were those who thought like Mussolini and believed that only he could make him back down from his refusal.

From the West, after the Casablanca Conference and Churchill's meeting in Adana with İnönü and Saracoglu, rumors of worsening tensions between Stalin and the Allies had multiplied and were confirmed by reports filtering out of Rome about contacts between Soviet agents and agents of von Ribbentrop's "parallel diplomacy." The fact that, since the end of 1941, the Japanese had not only made no secret of their desire for Germany and the Soviet Union to find a way to a peace agreement, but had also taken concrete steps in this direction by offering themselves as mediators and arbitrators, contributed greatly to the hope that these contacts might have a positive outcome. On March 7, 1942, the Tokyo Foreign Ministry had sent a document to this effect to both sides, but had also taken concrete steps in this direction by offering themselves as mediators and arbitrators. On March 7, 1942, the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo had sent a document to this effect to both governments. Hitler immediately told Oshima that there was no possibility of a negotiated peace between the two countries. At the end of August, Tokyo, whose soundings with the Soviets had given the impression of a less negative reception, had this

despite instructing Oshima to raise the issue again with Berlin and even discussing it with the German ambassador *there*. After about a month, Berlin reiterated its refusal, which, with truly strange timing, was followed only four days later by the Soviet rejection of the March proposal. Based on the available documentation, it is impossible to say whether, after this double failure, the Japanese took any further formal steps until March 1944, when, as we shall see in the next volume, they attempted to raise the issue again. What is certain is that, despite the double setback, Tokyo had not given up on its idea and had continued to exert more or less cautious direct and indirect pressure, at least on the Germans.

Japanese paper would soon become the one Mussolini relied on most. For the moment, however, he believed that he also had good *chances* personally. Although he considered Hitler a fanatic lacking in political sense, it seemed impossible to him that after Stalingrad he would not realize the need to relieve Germany of the increasingly oppressive burden of the Eastern Front, and he also had to hope that, if someone opened the way for them, even those of the Führer's collaborators who secretly thought like him and in some cases were moving in the same direction without Hitler's knowledge or making him believe that they were doing so out of pure Machiavellianism, that is, to sow discord between Stalin and the Allies, would be induced to come out into the open in some way and not take sides against him. Hence his decision, in the second half of February 1943, to resume talks with the Germans and with Hitler in particular.

On February 23, on the eve of von Ribbentrop's arrival in Rome, Bastianini communicated to Ambrosio the line to be taken with him and Warlimont: "defensive on the eastern front" and "paramount importance of the Mediterranean chessboard."

Two days later, the German minister had his first meeting with Mussolini, to whom he first delivered a letter from Hitler devoted mainly, as we have already seen, to the situation in the Balkans, and in particular to Italy's attitude towards Mihailovic's movement and the prospects for war in the Mediterranean and, more generally, for

"second front." The Russian problem was addressed almost *en passant* and with some statements that were anything but encouraging: Bolshevism and plutocracy pursued the same goals and were both expressions of Judaism, so that, for Hitler, it was impossible not to consider them "as one and the same entity":

If even one of these two forces wins, our fate will be unimaginable... I will therefore fight in the East until this colossus finally falls, with or without allies. I believe that the mere existence of this danger is so frightening that Europe will not have a moment's peace if, with immeasurable recklessness, it stands on the edge of a volcano and forgets the truth or simply refuses to see it⁽¹⁾.

Nor had von Ribbentrop shown himself to be more flexible during the meeting. Speaking privately with Bastianini, he had told him that, after the enormous losses they had suffered, it was time to "deal Russia the ^{final} blow"; otherwise, he had done nothing but paraphrase what Hitler had written in his letter. So Mussolini, after listening to him with an air of skepticism and boredom, did not pursue the subject, as he had initially intended to do, and limited himself to replying curtly that in Russia the main enemy was space and that, instead of insisting on attacks, it was necessary to erect a defensive barrier, possibly along the Dnieper, and wait for the situation to develop.

The fact that he dropped the subject with von Ribbentrop did not mean that Mussolini had *completely* abandoned his idea. This was all the more true given that, according to ^{Alfieri}, the initial reactions of von Ribbentrop's *entourage* to the positions taken by Italy during the talks in Rome had been more positive than negative, even though everyone agreed that Hitler would never renounce the new

Grazioli. In it, the general wrote: "In Russia, what was bound to happen has happened, namely the logical punishment for the mistakes made by the Axis on the eastern front of Europe.

First mistake: Believing it possible, and perhaps even relatively easy, despite being embroiled in a major war against enemy no. 1 (the Anglo-Saxons), to engage in another, equally serious war against enemy no. 2 (Bolshevik Russia), i.e., against a power that had at its disposal more than half of Europe and more than half of Asia in terms of *space and resources of men, raw materials, and labor*, and which had been preparing for war in a formidable manner for many years, using technically modern criteria and methods.

It is probable (though not certain) that in June 1941 there was an imminent danger of a Bolshevik armed invasion of Central and Southeastern Europe. However, given the circumstances, it would have been prudent, while waiting for the alleged threat to materialize, to limit oneself to building one of those powerful *defensive valleys* which (as the experience of this war teaches us) can withstand even powerful attacks if they are well equipped and dynamically defended. The *Maginot Line* fell because it was poorly defended; the *Siegfried Line*, if it had been attacked, defended by people as skilled and resolute as the Germans, would in all probability have resisted unshakably. But to launch almost blindly into a large-scale offensive on a theater of operations boundless in breadth and depth and against all the semi-barbarism and barbarism of Asia armed with the most advanced modern means of warfare (and this was known) was, perhaps more than recklessness, madness, which even the soul of Alexander the Great, more mad than reckless, would not have attempted.

Second mistake: Having committed this imprudence, and after realizing, in the summer of '41 and the following winter, what kind of enemy they were facing, they launched themselves again in the summer of '42, towards the east and southeast, creating the enormous salient of Stalingrad and the Caucasus, knowing full well that there would not be enough time to adequately reinforce it before the new winter, was an even more dangerous and reckless gamble, which no disciple of Clausewitz would certainly have committed.

It may be that compelling economic reasons (wheat from Ukraine, iron and coal from Donets, oil from the Caucasus and the Caucasus) have taken precedence over purely military considerations. But this does not invalidate the fact that, *from a military point of view*, the Axis's *two-pronged* offensive in Russia (especially the *second*) while the war against the Anglo-Saxons was becoming increasingly serious, was certainly a misstep on the part of the Axis, and today's powerful and successful Bolshevik counteroffensive is the natural and predictable response.

As things stand at present, there seems to be only one supreme necessity for Germany and its allies: to choose, without any concern for wounded pride or economic mirages, the most suitable military line to resist the rising Bolshevik tide, and to feverishly prepare men and resources along this line to make such an unshakeable defense possible. The Russians must also be tired and worn out after so many weeks of daring, but also bloody and necessarily chaotic, offensive. Against a wisely chosen and well-defended line of defense (as the Axis reserves will certainly be able to do), the Russians will have to dismount and stop (remember our Pivae).

However, on one condition! Let us not think, for now, of *offensive operations*, which unfortunately are already being rumored. It would be another mistake; one cannot prepare oneself solidly to *defend* after a setback of this kind while harboring *offensive* intentions. The Axis will consider resuming the offensive in Russia, if ever, after the Bolsheviks have been irrevocably arrested and worn down in front of the new German bulwark; and above all after the Axis has successfully overcome the far more dangerous threat that is emerging from the southeast. (ACS, *Segr. part. del Duce*, b. 5, fasc. 91/R, "Francesco Saverio Grazioli").

In his memoirs, Grazioli writes that Mussolini had read the report with him, using it as a basis for harshly criticizing Hitler's fanaticism, declaring himself fully convinced that Russia should now be limited to "building a wall" and reiterating his belief that a separate peace with Stalin would be of great advantage.

The same source reports that Mussolini sent the report to Bastianini, whom the general met on March 12, and gave him a note in which he advocated a rapprochement between Italy and the USSR, both to thwart possible German opposition to a separate peace and to preempt Germany on this path in case it was induced to take it sooner or later (see L. E. LONGO, *Francesco Saverio*

major summer offensive that he was preparing. But here too, there was an opening towards Italy that indicated a growing fear, at least among some, that the Führer's obstinacy could further aggravate the situation and provoke dangerous reactions among the Allies.

That if, according to what Alfieri claimed he had been told during his return trip to Germany by the head of the Auswärtiges Amt, Schmidt, Ambassador Ritter, and Dr. Megerle, during the height of the formidable offensive next summer, we were unfortunately to find once again that events were not unfolding according to plan and that an uncertain situation was developing, it would be all the more necessary to rush to offensive next summer, we were unfortunately to find once again that events were not unfolding according to plan and that an uncertain situation was developing, it would be all the more necessary to take timely remedial action, making use, especially on this occasion, of Italy, to which the small European nations look as the "mother of civilization and justice."

Proof that the "Duce" had not given up on his idea can be found in the letter he sent to Hitler on March 9 in response to the one brought to him by von Ribbentrop. In it, as already mentioned, Mussolini announced to the Führer that he wanted to talk to him "exhaustively" about the war in Russia; but he did not request a meeting, limiting himself for the moment to proposing to stabilize the front with an "eastern wall" so that Russia, "exhausted of strength," would no longer constitute a "mortal danger" and the Axis could face the increasingly dangerous Anglo-Americans with a good chance of success.

As expected, the letter had no effect. On March 14, Hitler replied to Mussolini, pretending not to have understood what he had ^{written}²:

The stabilization of the eastern front, which I hope is now definitively underway, will allow me, Duce, depending on your state of health and your commitments, to meet with you personally, perhaps in the very near future. I believe this is absolutely necessary, as the topics are so vast and important that it is not possible to deal with them exhaustively in short letters... But, as I mentioned above, I believe I can now say in all conscience that the eastern front is finally consolidated and will be further strengthened in the coming weeks, and that the initiative already underway will now return entirely to our hands.

According to what Alfieri wrote to ^{Bastiani} a week later, Mussolini's letter had actually "strongly impressed" Hitler and had been received with "deep satisfaction" - especially

for the part dedicated to the war on the Russian front - "in the circles of the Führer's close collaborators and Minister von Ribbentrop."

Not only that, Alfieri explained, because with the phrase "I wonder if it is too risky to repeat the struggle against the infinite and practically unattainable and elusive space of Russia," the Duce identifies with sure judgment the most delicate and serious point of the entire political-military situation in its current phase, logically hinting at its probable developments while clearly indicating the possibility of other solutions containing fewer unknowns, but because he fuels hopes that his authoritative words, heard by the Führer, may radically influence his decisions.

The spirit of the Führer is still dominated and pervaded (on another occasion I wrote "dazzled") by the fanatical desire—to use the word that recent propaganda has made fashionable—to continue the war against Russia until it is defeated or at least dealt a fatal blow through a series of offensives conducted without sparing men or resources...

The 1942 campaign culminated in the Battle of Stalingrad, which Hitler had conceived as a resounding political success and around which he subsequently sought to create a legend of epic military sacrifice.

This series of operations, conceived and conducted by the Führer, whose practical results did not live up to expectations, while significantly affecting Germany's total war potential, ended up weighing down the strategic situation on the Russian front...

With the Soviet winter offensive halted, Germany is currently experiencing a state of euphoria similar to that seen last year when the Duce and the Führer met in Salzburg. I should point out that this euphoria is limited to the Führer and does not seem to be widespread either in the country or among the ruling circles.

In this atmosphere, Hitler's intention to resume the initiative on the Soviet front at the beginning of the summer reemerges and is reaffirmed. Opinions in Germany seem to agree on the advisability of such an initiative, as it appears necessary to restore the Soviet enemy's perception of German military power and to establish strongholds that will allow Germany to face any surprises with confidence. Where opinions in various circles seem to differ somewhat from those of Hitler is on the totalitarian nature of the all-out offensive that he seems to want to impose on those very operations.

While it is clear that the German army, however solid, disciplined, and well-armed it may be, no longer represents the formidable instrument that led to the victories of 1939, 1940, and 1941; that it is unlikely that a strategic plan, even if this time based solely on technical rather than political criteria, could succeed in identifying sufficiently close objectives whose conquest could be decisive; it should be noted, on the other hand, that in order to organize the new battle, it will be necessary to neglect other fronts and give up defending oneself if danger suddenly appears in other areas. It should be noted

Finally, the failure or even partial success of an offensive proclaimed to be definitive could this time have significant negative consequences on the German masses, who in recent months have been subjected to increasing work demands, made even more burdensome by increasingly strict discipline and ever greater restrictions imposed on civilian life.

The keen interest with which, as I said at the beginning, some serious responsible figures have visibly welcomed the doubts expressed by the Duce about the advisability of a totalitarian offensive on the eastern front is clearly a reflection of the doubts that are arising in the minds of many German leaders, who hope that during the upcoming meeting between the two leaders, the Duce, speaking alone with the Führer with absolute clarity and precision, will draw him out of that fanatical atmosphere that has caused him to lose his proper view of things and free him from the torment of the Soviet sphinx that totally dominates his thinking...

At the present time, it is more vital than ever to strike where the danger appears most urgent and where the consequences of failure could be most serious.

Well, and the judgment of competent military experts confirms this, Soviet Russia, while not appearing so weakened as to give rise to serious hopes of achieving a quick victory over it, certainly no longer seems in a position to overcome the resistance of a solid German defensive line. The Duce's proposal to build an insurmountable bulwark of men and materials there is therefore all the more well-founded and acceptable.

The situation in the Mediterranean, however, appears to be quite different, where the weight of Anglo-American arms is becoming more noticeable and where Washington and London are showing that they want to achieve the long-awaited success at any cost.

If the Führer were to abandon, at least for the moment, the idea of a total offensive in the east in order to concentrate the mass of forces that would thus become available in a sector of the Mediterranean, it would be possible to achieve, with infinitely fewer resources, with greater probability and with consequences that would perhaps be far greater for the entire war economy, that decisive success which he cannot conceive of as possible except on the eastern front.

As soon as he received the letter, Bastianini had Mussolini read it. Concerned as he was about the offensive that the Allies had launched against the Axis forces in Tunisia in those very days, he must have found in it further encouragement to press Hitler and, without wasting any time, on March 26, he wrote him a new letter, much more explicit than the one of fifteen days earlier: the 'Russia chapter' had to be closed, preferably with peace, otherwise with a 'wall'. While waiting to meet him, he wrote¹,

let me return, Führer, to the subject that I consider at this moment to be the decisive one:

alliance or war. After long and tormented deliberations, which you have often told me about, and which few people understand better than I do, you chose war. History has proved you right. Russia had deceived Europe and the world, including through its campaign against Finland, and truly posed a formidable threat behind the Axis. In almost two years of war, through grave sacrifices and unprecedented heroism, you succeeded in weakening Russia to such an extent that it cannot pose a significant threat, at least for a long time to come.

That is why I say that the Russian chapter can be closed. With peace, if possible, and I believe it is possible, or with a defensive arrangement—an imposing eastern wall—that the Russians will never be able to cross. The point of view from which I start to reach this conclusion is that Russia cannot be destroyed, since it was and is defended by a space so large that it can never be conquered and held. The summer advances and winter retreats cannot be repeated without leading to exhaustion—albeit mutual—but to the complete and exclusive advantage of the Anglo-Americans. I would add that relations between Stalin and the Allies are very bad and the political moment is rather favorable to us. In my opinion, the annihilation of Russia cannot take place, even through an intervention by Japan, which is highly unlikely given the enormous distances involved. We must therefore, in one way or another, close the Russian chapter. On the day this happens, we can raise our flags, because we will have victory firmly in our grasp. With England deprived of the last continental army—the most powerful—on which it relied, the Axis—with all its resources—would face the West and regain the strategic initiative that, since the fall, has passed into the hands of the enemy, both on land and in the air.

On March 17, after Hitler's disappointing response to Mussolini's letter of the 9th, Rome had instructed Alfieri to urge a meeting between the two, leaving Hitler free to decide where in Italy, Salzburg, Munich, and, despite the Duce's health, even Görnitz if necessary. With the Allied offensive in Tunisia, the efforts had come to a brief halt; but in the end, the meeting was set for April 7 at Klessheim Castle, with the participation of von Ribbentrop, von Mackensen, Bastianini, Alfieri, and the main military collaborators of the two dictators with their experts, and an "open" agenda, but one that in fact included all the issues on the table between Italy and Germany.

On the Italian side, preparations had been extremely thorough, perhaps more so than on any other occasion of this kind. In the note in which Ambrosio summarized the Supreme Command's point of view and requests, the Russian question did not appear, except perhaps indirectly where, at the beginning, the need for a "single vision of the conduct of the war, the general lines of which must be established by mutual agreement" was emphasized.

However, Palazzo Chigi had thoroughly prepared itself to deal with this situation and, among other things, had drawn up a study, "Notes on ^{Soviet} Policy," which was "descriptive and innocuous" but "designed to open the eyes of the Germans" to whom it had been submitted in advance. Almost fearing that at the last moment Mussolini might not speak clearly to Hitler on April 6, Alfieri (who four days earlier had sent the "Duce" a long dispatch on operations on the Russian front in which he had emphasized that the Germans, despite having "decidedly improved" their situation in the last month, had not achieved all the objectives they had set themselves, so that in High Command circles there were questions as to whether it would not be better to "wait behind a well-guarded defensive line for the Bolshevik armies to attack, in order to engage them and defeat them with the 'qualitative' superiority of the German forces") For his part, he had given him a memorandum⁵ that largely echoed what Alfieri himself had written to Bastianini on March 21 and concluded with these words:

Even if, as Hitler believes, the offensive goes well, the results cannot—barring a miracle—be conclusive and decisive.

That is why, on the eve of the meeting, which takes place at a particularly important moment in the war, while the peoples of the Axis and Europe are tense in anticipation of decisive decisions, the serious political and military currents—of which I have already made myself the interpreter—believe that on this occasion the Duce, alone with the Führer, must speak without scruples or reservations, with absolute clarity and precision, to draw him out of that fanatical atmosphere that has caused him to lose his proper view of things, and to free him from the dazzling obsession with the annihilation of the Russian sphinx, an obsession that has now become the true ruler of the solitary ascetic who, living in a forest in East Prussia, surrounded by his own timid confidants, has become irremediably estranged from the natural demands of life.

Both the Italian and German minutes relating to the work carried out in plenary meetings and discussions between the main representatives of the two countries are very brief and provide a very partial and reductive picture of both the extent of the contacts and the issues and positions that emerged during ^{them}. Since, in particular, there are no minutes or reports of the private discussions between

Hitler and Mussolini: it has been widely claimed that, faced with the Führer's initial negative reaction, the Duce gave up insisting that he accept his point of view on the need to end the war in the East one way or another. Deakin also seems to lean towards this theory and, while citing (and tempering with a series of "it is possible" and "it seems") some indirect evidence that reduces its significance he focuses mainly on the minutes of the von Ribbentrop - Bastianini, which show that he did raise the issue, focusing essentially on two arguments: that no one in Rome doubted that the USSR would eventually be knocked out of the fight, but that nevertheless "the Duce believes that continuing the bloody struggle on the Russian front to the bitter end ultimately plays into the hands of the plutocratic powers" and that it was necessary to ask what would happen in the meantime in the Mediterranean "where we have lost all initiative and where we find ourselves so exposed" but, faced with the certainty and intransigence of the former he would focus

German abroad Megerle, head of the Italy Office at Wilhelmstrasse, Urach, and head of the Press Office, Schmidt) and pp. 287 ff. (for those among the military leaders), and ADAP, S. E, V, pp. 543 ff.

As for Mussolini, documents from his private office show that he had an initial meeting with Hitler as soon as he arrived at Klessheim Castle on April 7, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. They two had a second meeting, again alone, the following day from 12:05 p.m. (supra) (T) 303, which was also extended to include Göring from 1:32 p.m. to 1:50 p.m. In the early afternoon, from 1:50 to 2:50 p.m., Mussolini and Hitler attended a plenary meeting dedicated to examining the military situation, which was also attended by Bastianini, Alfieri, Ambrosio, and General Marras on the Italian side, and Göring, von Ribbentrop, von Mackensen, and Dönitz on the German side. After the meeting, Mussolini received Alfieri twice, from 3:30 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. (e) and from 3:50 p.m. to 4:15 p.m., after which he had a third meeting with Hitler from 4:20 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. This was followed by three more meetings, with Bastianini from 6:50 p.m. to 7:10 p.m., with von Ribbentrop (Bastianini also present) from 7:10 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. (e) and finally with Ambrosio from 8:10 p.m. to 8:35 p.m. H 9 vi^(a) (un) another private conversation between Hitler and Mussolini, who subsequently received Göring and Himmler separately. On the morning of the 10th, there was a final conversation between the two dictators, who met again at breakfast, also attended by Göring, von Ribbentrop, and Bastianini.

The documentation of the Private Secretariat also records the conversations Mussolini had on the train on April 1 during his return trip to Rome: 11:12-20 a.m.: Ambrosio, 12:25-12:35 p.m.: Bastianini, 14:25-15:20 (at breakfast):

on other issues under discussion and especially on his plans to make the Germans accept Videa that the Axis should counter the "Atlantic Charter" with its own "European" document.

In reality, there are many sources that agree that Mussolini (even though the journey had greatly fatigued him and he suffered from an ulcer attack in Klessheim) explicitly addressed and vigorously supported his point of view despite the lively reaction with which it was immediately received by Hitler, and that he did not give up on it at all, so much so that when, less than twenty days later, Bastianini met with von Ribbentrop again, he instructed him to tell him that he still held the same position on the war with Russia and that he was convinced that "it will be extremely difficult to deal a truly decisive blow to Russian military power" All the Italian participants in the conference dwelled on or mentioned the "very heavy" atmosphere that weighed on it: attributing it solely to the clashes over the Russian question would be excessive, but it is more than possible that these clashes contributed heavily to determining it. What is certain, however, is that Hitler's intransigence (and the weakness and servility towards him of his collaborators, who privately shared Mussolini's views) not only deeply irritated the "Duce" and exacerbated his political contempt and personal hatred for him (to the point of telling Bastianini that from then on he would refuse to go to Hitler for "reports"), but also - together, of course, with the confirmation that the Germans had no intention of making a serious effort to help Italy - opened the first real crack in his "loyalty" towards the ally.

Despite their brevity, two testimonies—both from participants in the conference—seem worthy of mention: that of Paul Schmidt, according to whom Mussolini "strongly supported the opportunity for an agreement with the Soviet Union," and that of Leonardo Vitetti, who in his already oft-cited unpublished book on July 25 and September 1,4 has

problem. And then it will be England's turn, with which the Reich now has no intention of making peace.

As important as the Tunisian sector is, its importance is considerably less than that of the Russian front, and in any case he believes that considerations relating to that sector cannot cause the Reich to be distracted from the needs of sectors of more vital importance.

¹ See ODI, s. IX, X, p. 364 (minutes of the meeting between Bastianini and von Ribbentrop on April 29, 1943). According to G. BASTIANINI, *Uomini, cose, fatti* cit., p. 190, in June, when Göring came to Italy for the last time, Mussolini repeated to him "very forcefully" that it was necessary "to end the war with Russia by any means necessary and that the Reichsmarschall would be of the same opinion." However, Bastianini probably got the date wrong and was referring to a visit to Rome by Göring prior to the Klessheim conference, as there is no record of Göring having been in Rome after that.

² See in particular L. PIETROMARCHI, *Diary, sub date* (in the *Pietromarchi Archive*)-, E. ORTONA, *Il 1943 da Palazzo Chigi* cit., p. 1099 (April 9, 1943), as well as, more generally, c. RIDOMI, *La fine dell'Ambasciata a Berlino (1940-1943)*, Milan

In turn, he wrote that at the Klessheim conference (which politically "did nothing but mark the separation of Italian interests from German ones" and made it definitively clear "that Germany had no intention whatsoever of renouncing absolute political and military control of the war") "Mussolini pleaded in vain for peace with Russia." To these two testimonies must be added what was said in a report by Rudolf Likus to von Ribbentrop on April 19, 1943, concerning Japanese-German relations. It stated that the Japanese embassy in Berlin understood that Mussolini, in discussing the Russian question with Hitler, had mentioned the possibility that Japan, "under certain conditions, could act as a mediator" between the Axis and the USSR, and that it believed that Mussolini's idea was shared, if not actually encouraged in some way, by Tokyo.

In his memoirs, Bastianini discusses the Klessheim conference at length, but his focus is mainly on his efforts to launch the "Charter of Europe," so he makes only a few brief references to the Russian question. He reports that, immediately after the second meeting with Hitler and then during the return journey, Mussolini told him that he had "insisted" that he find a way to end the war with Russia, given that the troops engaged there were "indispensable elsewhere," but that he had not been able to talk to him "about any kind of sondage" (during the outward journey, Bastianini had suggested that he propose a double peace sounding to Hitler, the Germans to the Soviets, through the Swedish channel, and the Italians to the British²) since he said he was sure "that he would deal the final blow to Russia very soon"³.

Bastianini, again in his ^{memoirs}, recounts another episode that is worth mentioning. The day after his return to Rome, on April 12, as soon as the undersecretary for foreign affairs entered his office in Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini, in a fit of rage, not only told him that he would no longer be reporting to Hitler, but also lashed out at him with extreme violence:

However, they wonder whether, by rejecting his request to "end" the war in the East and while claiming to be confident of defeating the USSR in a very short time, Hitler had given Mussolini the impression of being less confident than he wanted to appear, of harbouring some doubts and of not entirely ruling out the possibility of entering into serious negotiations with Stalin if the summer offensive did not yield the results he expected, and whether he had even hinted at this to him. In that case, given that Mussolini, for whom every passing day was a step towards the abyss, was full of resentment towards Hitler, it would explain not only and not so much why, referring to the king at the conference, he told him that he had "found a great deal of understanding on Hitler's part" (which could have been just a clumsy attempt to reassure the sovereign who, as we have said, also hoped that a separate peace with the USSR could get Italy out of the dead end it found itself in), but also various other things. This would explain the countless rumors—which, if we consider some of their details (including that Hitler absolutely wanted to maintain possession of Ukraine), could only have originated in well-informed circles and among well-informed people close to Palazzo Venezia or Palazzo Chigi - which began to circulate in Milan and especially in Rome during the days of the conference and even more so in the days immediately following, and which claimed that Hitler and Mussolini (on the latter's initiative) were studying a peace plan to be submitted to the Russians. This would also explain why, in the weeks following the Klessheim conference, Mussolini not only said several times (for example to Pirelli) that he had insisted to Hitler and "the OKW generals that they should not attack Russia with full force," but also took various steps in this direction, to the point that in mid-May Alfieri felt compelled to let him know that, in his opinion, it was useless to insist, given that Hitler was still "intimately and deeply" convinced that he could inflict a "severe blow" on Russia, and those among his closest associates who could have had a positive influence on him (Göring, von Ribbentrop, Himmler, Bormann, Goebbels) did not dare to act. Above all, it would explain why Mussolini—despite no longer hoping for substantial aid from Germany and realizing that, despite his efforts, the home front was now collapsing—responded to pressure from Bastianini, who, after Klessheim, had begun to insist more vigorously for a disengagement from the

Germans, postponing "a move in this direction in Berlin" (as well as that for the convening of a conference on Europe and the war between the members of the Tripartite) until the end ^{of the summer}. He held fast to this position not only in mid-May, when Pius XII informed him that, in view of the threat of "ever greater mourning and ruin" that "loomed over Italy," he was "willing to do everything possible to come to the aid of the suffering people," but also because, as Garzia rightly observed, Mussolini had already been thinking for several months that the Vatican and the White House were plotting against Italy and fascism, but even after the landing in Sicily and even on his return from Feltre, on July 22, when—if we accept Badoglio's testimony—he promised the king to break away from Germany by September 15, and again on the morning of July 25, when, as we shall see, he asked the Japanese to support with all their might an extreme move against Hitler in order to bring about the cessation of hostilities with Russia.

In 1946, while awaiting execution in Nuremberg prison, General Jodl wrote some notes on Hitler's influence on the conduct ^{of the war}, at the end of which he stated in no uncertain terms that by the end of 1942 - early 1943, Hitler was well aware that "the god of war had turned his back on Germany and moved to the other side," and that despite this, he continued to fight for another two years or more, refusing to

embracing the idea of "unconditional surrender" and without worrying about the unnecessary sacrifices it imposed on the German people. Trying to explain Hitler's behavior in terms that were not just those of madness, Jodl came to this conclusion:

Before any other man in the world, Hitler imagined and knew that the war was lost. But can a man give up on a state and a people before they are actually lost? A man like Hitler could not... He allowed himself to be buried under the ruins of his state and his hopes.

Is it possible to attribute a somewhat similar behavior to Mussolini? Is it possible to think that his refusal to acknowledge that the only viable path was now that of his abandonment of power and an armistice, a separate peace with the Allies? It is possible, but, all things considered, not very credible. This is because the 'Duce' was not a fanatic like the Führer and, unlike Hitler towards the Germans, he felt deeply responsible towards the Italians, whom he loved in his own way, even if he attributed to them a series of 'character' flaws, a lack of national awareness and an equally poor sense of statehood. This was also because, for Italy in 1943, capitulation, an armistice, a reversal of the front (a solution that would never have been reached, despite the responsibilities he attributed to the Germans and his hatred of Hitler), and a separate peace were all ways out that presented a decisive obstacle in Mussolini's eyes: the presence of the Germans in Italy and Hitler's certain reaction against Italian 'betrayal'. Hence his initial rejection of them, his acceptance of them as a hypothesis, i.e., at the level of sondages, but remaining deeply convinced that the only solution to the problem was that of an agreement with the Soviet Union, which, moreover, he thought would still leave the door open to a final victory for the Tripartite or a general compromise peace. That said, the question remains whether it was only a sense of desperation, the impotence to which he had been reduced, and the moral inability to step aside, to hand over to others, in short, to give up the war for Italy before Germany also lost it, or whether there were other reasons, other hopes, that kept him anchored to this solution.

One hope that must have encouraged him not to give in was certainly that Hitler, if his summer offensive (which took the form of the attack on the Kursk salient and the attempt to annihilate Soviet forces in the Caucasus) did not have the success that was said to be certain, would have to, willy-nilly, take into consideration what he had written and said to him. Hence the need for Mussolini to wait, before doing anything else, for the conclusion of the

new German summer campaign. This was all the more so because the fact that it began later than in previous years initially gave him hope—also based on reports from ^{Alfieri} in Berlin—that Hitler, listening to his suggestions, had renounced any large-scale action. Nor can another fact be underestimated: Hitler, albeit to deny the possibility of an agreement with Stalin, had explicitly admitted to him that there had been contacts between Germany and the USSR for a possible peace, and this not only confirmed what had leaked out in Rome about the soundings that had taken place in Sweden between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 between emissaries of the two countries, but also left room for hope that Hitler was not actually unwilling to negotiate. Finally, as we have already said, it cannot be entirely ruled out that Hitler had given him the impression during their *tête-à-tête* in Klessheim—if he did not even hint at it—that the meeting in June, before the start of the German summer offensive, between von Ribbentrop and Molotov could certainly not have been a personal initiative of von Ribbentrop, without the knowledge and against the will of the Führer - that he was not radically opposed, under certain conditions, to an agreement, so Mussolini was determined to wait for the outcome of the operations on the Eastern Front, thinking that, whatever the outcome, their cost to both sides would make at least one of them more willing to accept the other's conditions and that Japan's mediation would be of great help in this.

As soon as he was appointed undersecretary, Bastianini tasked Prunas, Guariglia, and Paulucci di Calboli to attempt to build a "bridge" to the Allies at their own "risk and peril." Of the three ambassadors, Mussolini placed the most trust in Paulucci (probably because of their long acquaintance from 1922 to 1927, when Paulucci had been his chief of staff at Palazzo Chigi, and because he knew of his strongly anti-German sentiments).

It had to be Paulucci. This explains why, while the other two had reached their posts in Lisbon and Ankara without him feeling the need to speak to them, on February 13 (two days after speaking with Bastianini, from whom he had learned that Salazar had promised Prunas his support in the event of any approaches with the Allies) and again on April 2, he summoned Paulucci to Palazzo Venezia and told him: "We are being squeezed by the Germans, see if you can find a way out." In Madrid, however, Paulucci realized that he was being closely watched by the Germans and, in order to make the necessary contacts, he had to enlist the help of a professor from the local Italian Cultural Institute, Ippolito Galante, who, through "an influential Swiss friend," only in May and June did he finally manage to meet with some Allied diplomats, including a certain Dr. Bohm and the military attaché Colonel Hohen-thal, both Americans, presenting them with Italy's desire to break away from Germany and trying to find out the conditions under which they believed it could exit the conflict. However, the response was not encouraging; the Allies demanded unconditional surrender, "as well as precise information about the deployment of our troops, defense systems, and locations where a landing on the Italian coast could most easily be carried out." Even less encouraging was the response Galante received when he subsequently sought to find out about any possible

"political conditions": in fact, it caused a "certain stiffening" of the interlocutors who, in response, limited themselves to assuring Galante that they would seek instructions from their respective governments; after which they dropped the contact. Thus, Paulucci's "bridge" came to nothing. And it might almost have gone unmentioned if Mussolini had not been personally involved in the attempt, which helps to shed light on his behavior not only in relation to the moment when Paulucci was tasked by Bastianini with "building the bridge" and its validation by Mussolini, but also in the months that followed, even after the landing in Sicily.

The task assigned to Paulucci highlights three things: *first*, that since February Mussolini had realized that the game was lost and that it was absolutely necessary to find a way out; *secondly*, that, while focusing entirely on the Russian way out, he did not rule out the possibility of having to resign himself to the Anglo-American one; *thirdly*, that, despite his ideological prejudices, he must have thought that the Casa Blanca declaration on 'unconditional surrender' had for London and Washington a va-

¹ The relevant documentation is kept in the *Paulucci di Calboli Archive* and was partially used by K. MILESI FERRETTI in *L'attività diplomatica di Giacomo Paulucci de' Calboli Barone (The Diplomatic Activity of Giacomo Paulucci de' Calboli Barone)*, a thesis defended in the academic year 1970-71 at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Rome, pp. 334 ff. and in particular pp. 343 ff.

essentially propagandistic and intimidating rather than truly political, of unquestionable principle, and therefore wanted to explore the possibilities of negotiation and learn about the conditions that might be proposed.

On closer inspection, Bastianini's position was not very different. After Klessheim, he had abandoned all hope of a Russian solution and had staked everything on a breakaway from Germany and a separate peace with the Allies in agreement with Hungary, Romania, and possibly Bulgaria, thinking that presenting itself as the leading country in the operation would ensure Italy a privileged position and treatment. In theory, and according to the traditional patterns that had governed international politics in the past, this could even have been a partially valid argument (since it underestimated the German factor and overestimated the Allies' possibilities both from a military point of view and in terms of relations with the Soviets), but it suffered from a fundamental flaw which Mussolini, thanks to his greater political acumen and ideological hostility towards the Anglo-Americans, largely avoided (since he too, in the end, made a distinction between the US and England that underestimated, on the one hand, the strength of the ideological and moral reasons that were at the root of the alliance between the two great democratic powers and, on the other hand, the impossibility for Churchill to impose, even if he had wanted to, his own point of view on Roosevelt in matters that were of ideological and moral value to the American president): not having realized the new character of the war, Bastianini believed that, if skillfully managed and handled from a position of strength (which in his plans was to be ensured by speaking also on behalf of other countries that, like Italy, wanted to get out of the war), a traditional separate peace could not only be concluded, but concluded on terms that were not too onerous and that did not even require Mussolini's 'withdrawal', if only because - as he told Pirelli on June 18 - his remaining in power would constitute 'a

element of order." Hence his attempts, ever since he entered Palazzo Chigi, to 'build bridges' in order to sound out the intentions and, above all, the demands of the Allies, particularly the British (whom he considered more interested and willing than the Americans to treat Italy 'fairly' and better disposed towards him personally, having known and appreciated him during his time as the embassy in London), but also his reluctance to actually speed up a decision that he felt was necessary but which, on the one hand, was not yet 'ripe' in terms of both the actual possibility of initiating discussions on behalf of those who were to be the *partners* in the operation and the

Mussolini's "green light" and, on the other hand, dangerous because of the reactions it would provoke in Berlin. So until mid-July, when everything was already falling apart, he did not really try to force Mussolini's hand.

good memory so that the step is taken seriously. (I did not understand whether he wanted to cover for Mussolini and the King or whether it was really his own initiative).

Not only do I not offer to act as a diplomatic explorer, but I also avoid giving Bastianini the opportunity to make a specific invitation, even though the conversation is clearly aimed at that goal. Instead, I say: "You know what the first condition for the success of such negotiations is: Mussolini's withdrawal."

Bastianini does not pick up on the remark and, after digressing onto other topics, says: "The British should understand that Mussolini's permanence would be an element of order," and adds: "The British and Americans will also ask to guard certain strategic points in Italy."⁹⁰

Me: "I sincerely hope that we have not reached the point of having to negotiate on these terms. It is something that can be endured if defeated, but never accepted in a negotiation. It is never a shame to be inferior to an enemy, but rather to be inferior to oneself."

BASTIANINI: "You're right. But do you think they would be satisfied with a return to non-belligerence?"

Me: "I don't know. But apart from respect for our moral repugnance at accepting occupation, they should understand that if they were to occupy certain parts of Italy, the country would be exposed to German reprisals. They cannot ask Italy to accept a solution that would add the continuation of war offenses to the moral offense."

BASTIANINI: "Yes. We would find ourselves in the same situation as France, occupied by the Germans and bombed by our former allies."

Although it was expected and anticipated, the Allied landing on the southern coast of Sicily on July 1 took everyone by surprise, and even more astonishing was the speed with which—after the first few days of effective resistance, which even led to the belief that the Allied troops could be blocked on the famous "shoreline" and thrown back into the sea - the Allies took control of the well-fortified base of Augusta almost without a fight and penetrated the interior of the island, cutting it in two and arriving in Palermo on the 22nd, where they were greeted with jubilation by a large part of the population. The Anglo-Americans' great air superiority undoubtedly played a significant role in making such an overwhelming success possible, against which the efforts of the German Air Force and the heroism of the Italian Air Force could do little. It is equally clear, however, that, except for specific cases that occurred mainly in the second phase of operations, the behavior of the Italian troops—unlike that of the Germans—was in all respects far below that of previous years in Greece, North Africa, and Tunisia. It was well known that there was now a "keen sense of mistrust among the troops about the chances of victory for the Axis"², as was the state of prostration of a large part of the population (especially in the major urban centers) due to the continuous massive bombing, the increasingly difficult living conditions, and, above all, the irregularity and scarcity of food supplies, and the behavior, almost like that of occupation troops, of many German units: as well as the negative influence this had on the troops, especially those

of Sicilian origin, who, in fact, were among those who, after the first clash with the enemy, were most likely to scatter and ^{disperse}, anticipating the mood of "everyone home" that would characterize the days immediately following the armistice. Although this mood was well known, no one expected it to take on such vast and radical forms and dimensions that it would profoundly affect the possibility of serious (and honorable) resistance and confirm the Germans' conviction that the Italian army could not be relied upon and that, therefore, it was useless to deprive themselves of resources and men to help it and that it was much better to save everything that could be saved from the Sicilian trap and consider the Italian front only from a German perspective, i.e., intended solely to safeguard Germany's military and political interests south of the Alps and in the Italian occupation zones.

On July 12, when all hope of blocking the enemy on the "shoreline" had vanished, Mussolini instructed General Marras to send Hitler a dramatic message "by the fastest and safest means possible" in which the possibility of blocking the Allies was explicitly subordinated to the dispatch of "maximum immediate German air reinforcement," particularly fighter units: without this air support, "the enemy's land, naval, and air forces are such that the defense of the

and demanding the delivery of the car, which was not carried out due to the intervention of other people. Another evening, they showed up at the police station demanding to take possession of some of our remaining vehicles at gunpoint, but they were turned away. Yesterday morning, they took possession of my car after disarming the driver. I caught up with them in another car, as was my duty, but my intervention in my official capacity was to no avail, because I was hit by a musket shot and had to suffer the loss of the car, as I was overwhelmed by the number of violent men, who pulled out hand grenades and, brandishing machine guns, were ready to fire. Faced with this violence, I had to leave with my Chief of Staff and another official. A burst of machine-gun fire was directed at us and the two agents and a carabinieri who were accompanying us, but fortunately there were no consequences. The military situation remains unchanged. Long lines of disbanded and starving Italian soldiers can be seen reaching the villages of Etna, spreading panic and terror everywhere.

The population fears the development of dangerous banditry. Numerous lootings have taken place in the city, partly contained by the meager police forces available, who patrol the city day and night (ACS, *Ministry of the Interior, Directorate General of Public Security, General Affairs and Resources Division, Second World War*, b. 428, phase 209).

¹ Impressed and shocked by the confusing and dramatic news coming from Sicily, Mussolini sent the following telegram to General Guzzoni, commander of the forces on the island, on July 14: "I am receiving reports from too many sources of a lack of fighting spirit among some of your units. Impose the most severe penalties, both high and low, on those who do not fully perform their duty as soldiers" (see NAW, *Collection of Italian military records, I.T.*, 99, "Supreme Command" - "Operations in Sicily from July 9 to 19") and gave Ambrosio a note ("Situation") with a whole series of questions that clearly show how the events of the last four days had not only taken him by surprise but had gone beyond even his most pessimistic predictions, and how in this situation he was beginning to think (or was already deeply convinced) that what was missing and had been missing, apart from resources, was a plan and the will and ability to implement it, so that his final exhortation to "resist at all costs on land" and to "hinder the enemy's supplies with the massive use of our sea and air forces" sounded completely incredible (see DDI, s. IX, X, pp. 656 ff.). Mussolini published almost the entire text of this document in *Storia di un anno (History of a Year)*. Apart from a few insignificant variations, he did not publish points 9 (^{on} 11, namely the question of whether or not there was a plan to deal with a further landing (on the mainland) and the statement that among the troops on the island there was a "tendency to capitulate." See MUSSOLINI, XXXIV, pp. 333 ff.

Sicilian chessboard will be extremely difficult." Hitler responded to this appeal the following day, assuring that 250 fighter and bomber aircraft would arrive in Italy within the month, the dispatch of which had already been planned before the landing, and that in addition to these, a fighter group and seven bomber groups would be sent. The 1st Parachute Division would be airlifted to Sicily and the XXIX Panzer Grenadier Division would reach the Reggio Calabria area. However, the letter went on to say that the bulk of these forces and any others would only be transferred to Sicily if there was certainty that supplies for them across the Strait would be "unequivocally assured." This condition, which was clearly understood from the letter and even more so from the illustration and commentary that Kesselring made when he delivered it to Mussolini on the morning of the 15th, showed that the Germans, after the evidence provided by the Italian troops in the previous days ("... the unexpected rapid disintegration of the forces employed in coastal defense, which... at least in one of the most important sectors did not even accept combat..."), was of the utmost importance. In fact, it allowed Germany not to refuse the "Duce's" request, but not to satisfy it, placing all the responsibility on the disorganization, inefficiency, and lack of fighting spirit of the Italians and to prepare the ground to take advantage of the moment to advance the ultimatum to Rome ultimatum on which the OKW was now determined to base its military relations with Italy (whether Italy remained faithful to the alliance or, even more so, if it thought of breaking away from it): the assumption of command of the Italian-German forces (a euphemism for not saying Italian forces) by the Germans.

Already on the evening of the 12th, von Rintelen had told Mussolini on Hitler's behalf

solini "that certain Italian troops in Sicily had not fought adequately" and added that "if the Italians had no intention of fighting, the Führer would not send any more troops to Italy."⁴ Two days later, Alfieri, in a personal letter to Bastianini,⁵ not only confirmed that, based on the information in his possession, there was practically no doubt that

that the Germans wanted to conserve their forces as much as possible and considered Italy (as well as the territories of the other allies and those occupied) to be nothing more than one of the "bastions of the German fortress" that had to delay "any possible attack on the territory of the Reich" as long as possible, so that its aid would be meager and not sufficient to allow "a counteroffensive capable of reversing or at least effectively countering the situation" in Italy, but he began to suggest "to his daughter-in-law so that his mother-in-law would understand" the need to make a clean break with the situation. Quite frankly, Alfieri wondered:

How long will Italy, exhausted and attacked on all sides, be able to accompany and follow its ally Germany on its path of resistance which, as mentioned above, is likely to be very prolonged?

Italy is demonstrating once again - and everyone here clearly recognizes this - a truly admirable capacity for sacrifice and resistance.

But in war, and in a war such as the current one, even the most heroic sacrifice has human limits; and in any case, beyond a certain limit, such sacrifice is no longer productive.

Finally, in the closing remarks, perhaps to protect himself in case Mussolini took offense at such language (since, obviously, Alfieri thought that Bastianini would immediately submit the letter to the "Duce"), and partly because, realizing the difficulty of disengagement, he too must have thought that if anyone could convince Hitler to free Italy from the constraints of the alliance, it was Mussolini alone, Alfieri suggested that Hitler and Mussolini meet again to assess the entire situation from both a military and political point of view:

In these political and military circles, he wrote at the conclusion of what he had said up to that point, "serious people are wondering why the two leaders—unfortunately separated by a distance of more than 2,000 kilometers—do not agree on a common course of action and do not establish a common plan of action that takes into account the current imperative needs and future developments not only in the military sector, but also in the political sector."

The decisive day, in a certain sense, was July 16. In the morning, Bastianini accompanied von Mackensen to Palazzo Venezia. Mackensen was about to leave for Germany to report on the Italian situation in light of the military collapse in Sicily and its repercussions within the Fascist leadership (which he had discussed with Scorza), and he was therefore eager to test the waters with the Duce in Sicily and its repercussions within the Fascist leadership (which he had discussed with Scorza) and was therefore eager to take the pulse of the "Duce" in order to obtain all the information necessary to enable von Ribbentrop to evaluate it in its various aspects. After the ambassador left, Bastianini handed Mussolini Alfieri's letter and a "note" in which the reports and assessments contained therein were not only defined as accurate and in line with what Palazzo Chigi had long since independently

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acquired, but he fully endorsed them, and he submitted to him the draft of a telegram to be sent to ^{Hitler}. The draft ended with a sort of umpteenth appeal:

invade Germany; but he must have realized that even Kesselring, who had been the most vocal in arguing that the Italians should be helped and that more troops should be sent to Sicily for this purpose, had begun to show less conviction on the matter, and this must have further increased his distrust and hostility towards the Germans to the point that - as von Rintelen would astutely observe a few days later in one of his reports - despite the extreme drama of the moment, although he had requested the dispatch of aircraft, he had been careful not to ask for additional troops.

To this must be added that two days earlier, on July 14, Ambrogio had sent Mussolini an extremely ^{explicit} memo that opened with a very clear statement: the military situation was so serious that, unless there was a significant and immediate intervention by German "land and air" forces, the Supreme Command not only considered the fate of Sicily to be sealed in the short term and anticipated one or more new Allied landings (in Corsica, Sardinia, and the peninsula itself, most likely from the south, but perhaps also further north, to cut it in two), but also stated in no uncertain terms that it was impossible and futile to continue the fight. Because, as the "note" concluded,

Our ally cannot convince us that there is any chance of victory for the Axis unless the establishment of a second land front in Europe is prevented for as long as the war in Russia continues.

If this cannot be prevented, it would be up to the highest political authorities to consider whether it would be better to spare the country further grief and ruin and bring the fighting to an early end, given that the final outcome would undoubtedly be worse in one or more years' time.

In light of this complex set of factors, it is not surprising that Mussolini, when Bastianini saw that the "Duce" agreed with what he had written in his "note" and seemed willing to approve, at least in principle, the draft telegram to Hitler attached to it, tried to broaden the discussion to include even more drastic solutions, he did not dismiss him and, for the first time, agreed to talk about it explicitly. Back at Palazzo Chigi, Bastianini dictated the following "minutes" of the conversation to his closest collaborator, who had been with him since he was ambassador in London and then governor of Dalmatia:

BASTIANINI Duce, have you thought of a political solution?

DUCE There is no political solution.

BASTIANINI Allow me to disagree with you and let me explain my thinking. There is currently an enemy offensive on the territory of one of the Axis allies and there is a German offensive on the territory of one of our allies. There are frightening battles and terrible losses in prospect for the two enemy groups on the two fronts involved. This military situation puts the two opposing sides on an equal footing: this is an indisputable and important fact. I have the impression, and I would almost say the certainty, that the Vatican would be ready to take action if it knew that our ally would authorize it together with you.

DUCE Then we would have to convince Germany of such a possibility.

BASTIANINI I believe it would be in its interest. In any case, it is in Italy's interest

Italy to do something at least to find out what our enemies' intentions really are. You have no serious evidence in your hands to judge a situation that will force you to make decisions of historic importance.

DUCE (*interrupting*) But so far, only one battle has been lost, not the war. There are a respectable number of armored divisions in Italy.

BASTIANINI Agreed: and that is why now is the time, rather than when we might no longer have anything serious to oppose enemy landings. I am thinking of Italy, Duce, which will continue to exist even after we are dead. And of its future. And to its mission in the Mediterranean, made all the more valuable by the fact that America has set foot on that sea and has no intention of leaving it. England cannot have any interest in turning Italy into a graveyard. I would point out that, while our enemies have already set up a government of exiles for Hungary, this has not yet been done for us. The Pope has no interest in seeing Italy bloodied from one end to the other. I do not believe that America can wish to see our country fall into the hands of Bolshevism. All these are positive elements, and I therefore refuse to remain inactive and wait for tragic solutions.

DUCE But England will want to occupy the country, it will want to proceed with immediate disarmament, it will want to exploit Italy in every way against Germany, it will want to deprive it of every resource and every possibility of life. I will never hand Italy over to England.

BASTIANINI But you will certainly not do that, Duce. There is a precedent that I would like to remind you of. It is what happened in the other war with Bulgaria when hostilities between that country and the Allies ceased.

in the papers of Roberto Suster, another close collaborator of Bastianini. See also G. BASTIANINI, *Uomini, cose, fatti* cit., pp. 117 ff. In his memoirs (*ibid.*, pp. 115 ff.), Bastianini states that he secretly went to the Vatican on the night between July 15 and 16 with his chief of staff Babuscio Rizzo to speak with Cardinal Maglione, to ask him to issue the banker Fummi with a Vatican passport so that he could travel to London and make contact with the British, to find out whether the Holy See was willing to intervene with the Allies to persuade them to mitigate the "cruelty" of their indiscriminate bombing of Italian cities, and to inquire whether their plans included the establishment of an Italian government formed by exiles. There is no confirmation of this news, and it is likely that Bastianini misdated the conversation fifteen years later. In fact, E. ORTONA's diary (op. cit., p. 1125) shows that Bastianini, accompanied by Babuscio Rizzo, went to see the Cardinal Secretary of State on the evening of July 17, after having lunch with Fummi and obtaining his consent to try to make contact with the British. See also A. PIRELLI, *Taccuini* cit., p. 450 (July 19, 1943)

German troops were then authorized to leave Bulgarian territory, and Bulgaria was considered practically non-belligerent.

DUCE But this would not be the case for us, because England would take advantage of Italian territory to launch its attacks on Germany.

BASTIANINI I don't think, Duce, that the Alpine barrier would tempt the British General Staff to clash with you.

DUCE But there would be Slovenia.

BASTIANINI Not even in this case, because from Zara to Buccari, the valleys are more suitable than those of the Julian Alps, and to the west there is the Rhone Valley, which would be much closer, more convenient, and more profitable. In any case, Duce, trying to keep the worst away from Italy is our sacred duty. Leave it to me. You must remain unaware and do with me as you please if my work should become known prematurely. But let me do it. I believe that Italy owes us this proof of love. Let me bring someone closer in Lisbon. Let me do it on the other side of the Tiber too. You know nothing, and I take full responsibility and all the consequences.

DUCE But don't let Minister Prunas in Lisbon do it directly.

BASTIANINI Leave it to me. Don't worry about the people or the facts.

According to Bastianini's account of the conversation in his memoirs, the undersecretary, having obtained Mussolini's agreement in principle, immediately returned to Palazzo Chigi, fearing that he would be summoned at any moment by the "Duce" to Palazzo Venezia and told that he had changed his mind and that, therefore, no survey should be conducted. "But his phone remained silent for the rest of the day," and the next day Bastianini began to take action. He met with Fummi and convinced him to go urgently to Lisbon and possibly London to make contact with the British; he ordered Franson to leave immediately for Lisbon to inform Prunas of his intentions and, if possible, put him in touch with the people with whom he himself had been in contact the year before; he telegraphed Paulucci to return immediately to Rome; he informed Acquarone of the attempt he was making; and (in the evening or the next day) he went to Cardinal Maglione to ask for the help of the Holy See.

None of the operations that Bastianini wanted to activate would come to fruition. Fummi was unable to travel to London because, despite the good offices of the Vatican, the British did not grant him a visa to enter England, so on July 25 he was still in Lisbon. In Madrid, Paulucci and Galante were unable to re-establish the contacts they had made in previous months. Franson, who left for Lisbon on July 19 (but had to pass through Madrid first due to a setback), managed to reestablish the contacts he had had in previous years (it is unclear whether they had been completely severed or whether they had been kept alive to some extent by a Romanian semi-exile, Jon Pangal, who had acted as an intermediary at the time and whom he used again¹) and, most likely, to have Salazar conduct a survey on the British ambassador in the Portuguese capital, Ronald Campbell, but without any success, as London did not respond to his *advances*.

According to what he told Mario Toscano years later, Franson would have done everything possible to obtain assurances from the British that "the head of the fascist government" would be "spared." However, this is hardly credible; it is more likely that the British did not trust an intermediary who was not clear on whose behalf he was speaking - so much so that they thought his approach was part of the attempts made at that time by the Savoy family to save the monarchy, if not a German conspiracy - and that he was raising territorial issues (probably colonial⁵) that were completely out of place in those fran-

4) If the military situation in Italy were to worsen further, the only person capable of convincing Hitler to withdraw German troops from Italian territory is the Duce. Hence the need for England and America not to impose the immediate removal of the Duce as a precondition, which is clearly in their own interests. The Germans would first retreat to the Po line, where the Anglo-Americans would have to face them, and then to the Brenner line. Mussolini's intervention with Hitler could prevent them from having to face the Germans twice on our territory.

5) Italy has a special position in the Danube-Balkan region that its adversaries must take into account.

6) It is therefore necessary to prevent the Anglo-Americans from establishing a provisional government of exiles. This would mean civil war in Italy, an endless series of sufferings that the Church must certainly avoid.

7) A difference in wording, in a pejorative sense, has been noted between the messages from Churchill and Roosevelt broadcast on the radio and those on the leaflets dropped over Rome.

For the reference in point 2 to the "Russo case," see ADSS, VII, p. 228 note; as well as DDI, s. IX, XI, pp.

people. At least, this is what we can deduce from the dispatch that Ambassador Campbell sent to Eden on ^{July} 23:

Equally unimportant is the way in which Bastianini, in order to obtain his "Go ahead," he had suggested his idea. What matters is that Mussolini allowed Bastianini to attempt to make contact with the British and that he did so before the meeting in Feltre. This proves that he was aware not only of Italy's inability to continue the war under those conditions, but also that he did not believe it possible for the Germans to change their attitude towards him and actually help him deal with the situation. The course of the July 16 meeting with Bastianini also proves that for both the "Duce" and his undersecretary, the real and only knot to be untied at that point was that of *the relationship* with Germany or, in other words, its reactions to Italy's breaking of the alliance and its withdrawal from the war. And, between the two, it must be said that everything suggests that Mussolini was the one who posed the problem of how to untie this knot in the best and most realistic way. Hence, on the one hand, he gave the green light to Bastianini and his attempts to approach the British to try to sound out their intentions and conditions for peace, without however any illusion of being able to play the Danubian-Balkan card at the negotiating table, on which Bastianini continued to pin all his hopes, and, on the other hand, his perseverance, in the absence of other more credible alternatives, in believing that the only viable option was still and only to corner Hitler and finally convince him of the suicidal absurdity of continuing to bleed himself dry in Russia.

On his return from Klessheim, as mentioned above, Mussolini had declared that he would never again go to Hitler for a "report." And, in fact, between the end of May and mid-June, he had rejected more than one request from Berlin for a new meeting between him and the Führer. After the invasion of Sicily, however, it became more difficult to insist on refusals or even just to ignore the requests, both because they had become more pressing and because - whatever decision he ultimately made - it was impossible to mount even minimal resistance without German help, and the Germans were showing ever more clearly that they would adhere strictly and restrictively to what Hitler had written in his letter of July 13 and would not budge - despite the appeals that were coming in.

through Alfieri and Marras - from this position, avoiding precise answers on the dates of transfer and delivery of the forces and supplies that they had undertaken to make available ^{to Italy}. Finally, we cannot underestimate the fact that increasingly insistent rumors were reaching Rome from various sources, including Alfieri, that the Germans not only considered Sicily lost, but also thought of the Apennines as the most suitable area to establish a stronghold and block the Anglo-Americans' path northward. In this regard, Alfieri's letter to Bastianini from Berlin on July 17 is significant:

... 1) From our telephone conversation today, I have the distinct impression that, despite

The Italian side should communicate its forecasts to the German side for two reasons: to prevent the German command from being faced with surprises—which it would later complain about—and to induce it to make a further effort by sending additional resources. It is necessary to convince ourselves that we must speak clearly and precisely to our German comrades, using dates and figures, and impartially highlighting the negative consequences

lines of the hearings of the Private Secretariat) to personally deliver the "invitation." The peremptory nature of the invitation initially deeply irritated the "Duce," but he did not let the opportunity slip away. In a hurry, Palazzo Chigi then began to frantically organize the meeting (which probably explains why the letter, now useless, was never sent). Once a suitable location had been chosen, Villa Gaggia near Feltre, Ambrosio was informed by telephone by Mussolini at 4 p.m.; three hours later, the Italian delegation boarded the train, but without Mussolini. The 'Duce', partly to avoid overexerting himself and partly because he wanted a few hours of solitary meditation, flew to Riccione (accompanied only by De Cesare and Dr. Pozzi), from where he continued the next morning, again by plane, to Treviso (where the German delegation also arrived with three planes), and from there he continued to Feltre, where he had a quick meeting with Hitler, after which the two continued together by car to Villa Gaggia.

According to Ortona's testimony, Mussolini gave the impression of being "in good shape overall," while Hitler seemed like "a worn-out larva," with "something unreal" about him: "pale-faced, hunched over, he seemed suspended in an unearthly empyrean." In Klessheim, according to Goebbels, Mussolini appeared "just a tired old man," while in Feltre, it was Hitler who seemed to be in worse physical and mental condition, perhaps weighed down by a sort of inner turmoil and conflict between his personal feelings toward Mussolini and his "duties" as Führer, as he conceived them and which, as in the days immediately preceding his main military collaborators had all, more or less explicitly, made him understand, he *also* had to exercise towards the "Duce."

On July 15 and 17, two decisive ^{meetings} were held at Hitler's headquarters, during which Jodl presented the Italian situation in the bleakest terms, both from a military standpoint (the impossibility of holding Sicily for much longer, the imminent Allied landing in Corsica or Sardinia or on the peninsula or in Greece) and from a political standpoint (the unreliability of Italian commanders, tainted by a spirit of betrayal and anti-fascism). He argued that, given the importance of southern Italy for the defense of Greece, German forces should have established themselves in Puglia and Calabria, but that until the Italian command had been purged and "the most energetic measures" had been taken to prevent the decomposition of the Italian army, no one

could take responsibility for keeping German troops "south of the Apennines."
Hence Jodl's conclusion:

It is therefore necessary to implement an internal political decision in this regard. As a pretext, it could be argued that the unified command of the Anglo-Saxons must be opposed by a strictly unified command of the Axis in the Mediterranean. Since the Italians do not have suitable men, German commanders will have to be placed in the threatened areas. These proposals will certainly meet with opposition from all anti-fascist elements, and this in itself is sufficient reason to make a clean sweep in Italy, implementing the second stage of the fascist revolution. We will begin by entrusting all key Italian military positions to trusted commanders and end by removing from the Supreme Command and local commands all those in Italy who are in opposition. German commanders must be placed at all important points on the Mediterranean chessboard.

Faced with such a radical proposal, Hitler had hesitated, probably, as General Warlimont believed, thinking of the damage it would cause to Mussolini's prestige. However, both Dönitz and Rommel had essentially agreed with Jodl, so that - without making a formal decision and accepting, for the time being, the proposal of von Mackensen, the Prince of Hesse, and Göring to first ascertain Mussolini's actual state of mind before resorting to such a drastic solution (hence the "invitation" to meet with him, which von Mackensen immediately conveyed to him) - Hitler concluded that the most serious problem was the demoralization of the Italian army:

Only extremely rigorous measures, he said, such as those applied by Stalin in 1941 or by the French in 1917, could be of any benefit. If it were only a matter of individual units, we could appeal to their sense of honor, offering medals, etc., but the entire army is in a state of collapse and only barbaric measures can serve to save the nation... In Italy, a kind of directorate, tribunal, or court martial should be established in order to eliminate undesirable elements. There must still be some capable people in Italy; it is not possible that everything has gone to ruin from one moment to the next... Everything depends on a radical change in the Italian situation. If we can achieve this, it is worth the risk; otherwise, there is no point in throwing in more German troops and committing our last reserves.

Based on these conclusions, on the 18th, in Berchtesgaden, Warlimont had drafted a memo that was to serve as the basis for the talks the following day in Feltre. It revolved around a few specific points which, if accepted by Mussolini, would have meant Germany assuming total military control of the Italian theater of operations: the need to give

life to a single Mediterranean command, nominally assumed by Mussolini, but in reality exercised by a German general (who would have been Rommel); Italian troops would have been subordinate to it; as for the commands, including the Supreme Command, they would have been restructured and composed in such a way as to ensure maximum cooperation and loyalty; Finally, the air command would have been assumed by Marshal von Richthofen. Only under these conditions would the OKW have sent more troops to southern Italy to support the Italian units already there and those that would be transferred from the north.

That this was the Germans' true and only purpose for the meeting is demonstrated by the composition of their delegation: the vast majority were military personnel and very few politicians, all of whom were of secondary or tertiary importance, so much so that even von Ribbentrop and Göring were not part of it. In fact, the meeting came to nothing and left everyone dissatisfied.

Faced with a Hitler who was somewhat in a trance and somewhat possessed, increasingly pursuing his inner discourse on how to manage and live through the war "morally" (which he must have felt was now lost, even though he still had to hope for the new weapons that Germany was preparing) and considered the Russian front essentially from the point of view of the raw materials indispensable to the German war industry and the provisioning of Germany and Europe, Mussolini found himself practically unable to re-propose his point of view about the absolute necessity of ending the game in the East. To think that he could play the role of *the heretical corrupter* was, in such a situation, an absurdity that he, despite the high regard he had for his own dialectical and political abilities, immediately realized. Apart from his "fanaticism" and the increasing influence on him of certain *historical precedents*, in particular that of Frederick II (to whom he had made explicit reference in Klessheim, but who also loomed large behind some of his statements in Feltre), who emerged *irretrievably* defeated at the end of the Seven Years' War, Hitler's anti-Bolshevik prejudice seemed to give way increasingly to the need not to lose certain conquered territories, the possession and exploitation of which depended on Germany's ability to continue the war (focusing above all, in addition to the imponderable, on submarine warfare and new weapons in preparation). Given this logic, it became impossible to convince him to end the war in the east, especially in the very short time frame that was needed to stabilize the situation in Italy.

The available accounts of the only plenary meeting—from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on July 19—during which he spoke practically

only ^{Hitler}¹, all agree in presenting us with a Mussolini who, as soon as he realized that nothing would induce the Führer to listen to his warnings and proposals, first resigned himself to listening to the latter's pleas:

sitting on the edge of his overly large and deep armchair, listening impassively and patiently with his hands folded on his crossed legs;

then, as Hitler continued his torrent of words, he began to show signs of boredom, almost ^{dozing off}, and then, when the Führer moved from general talk to discussing the Italian situation in tones of genuine reproach, he became irritated:

Mussolini listened without showing any outward reaction. Only occasionally did he change position—as far as possible—nervously running his right hand over the lower part of his face, bringing his left hand behind his back and pressing a point where he must have been in pain: the one corresponding to his stomach ulcer. Every now and then he would take a long breath, like someone forced to endure a long, boring, and inconclusive speech; and with a tired and resigned look, he stared at Hitler, who continued undeterred, his voice increasingly shrill: with his accusations and ^{recriminations}.

And his irritation turned to impatience when, around noon, De Cesare brought him the first news of the bombing that Rome was undergoing at that moment:

At noon, Alfieri wrote², De Cesare, the Duce's private secretary, timidly entered with a piece of paper in his hands. Mussolini glanced at it quickly, forcing Hitler to interrupt himself, and read the brief message, translating it into German: "At this moment, the enemy is violently bombing Rome."

A pause of silence. Hitler remained impassive. Was he masking, with stubborn Teutonic dissimulation, capable only of stiffening and hardening, a sincere emotion for the city that he admired with deep and somewhat rhetorical feeling, as is the case with all those who were not and never will be heirs to the classical world? Did he remember the solemn declaration he had made several times to Mussolini that if the enemy dared to drop a single bomb on Rome and Florence, he had already ordered and made all the necessary preparations for a bomber squadron to raze an enemy city to the ground?

"I want detailed information," Mussolini ordered his secretary.

"I have already tried to do so. But the phones in Rome are cut off: we have no direct line; communication is practically impossible."

"Insist," Mussolini ordered, annoyed.

De Cesare withdrew. Another pause of silence ensued, during which the two dictators stared intently into each other's eyes. Hitler resumed speaking, continuing his indictment. Through phrases delivered emphatically, as if speaking to a crowd, he advanced reservations, objections, reproaches, and criticisms. The German commanders themselves had often been unable to carry out their actions due to the slowness and disorganization of some Italian commanders. He insisted, by comparison, on the radical measures he had taken in Germany at the time.

Mussolini began to show signs of impatience and nervousness.

De Cesare reappeared; Mussolini almost snatched the paper from his hands and, interrupting Hitler, read aloud in German: "The violent bombing continues; about 400 aircraft are flying at very low altitude; suburbs and even buildings in the center have been severely hit; little reaction from anti-aircraft batteries."

Silence. Mussolini, turning to Ambrosio: "We must communicate this in today's war bulletin. All of Italy and the world must know... "We don't have time today." "Delay the release of the bulletin, but it is necessary to give ample details: the duration of the bombing, the number of aircraft, the reaction of the artillery, the stoic behavior of the population. Do not publish the number of victims for now, not even an approximate figure."

Ambrosio cut him off irritably: "All that is the responsibility of the senior officer, who is in charge of writing the report. There's no point in wasting time on such details right now." "There's no point in wasting time on such details right now."

And Hitler resumed speaking...

Mussolini struggled to control his anxiety and suffering. In an unusual gesture, he wiped his forehead twice with his handkerchief, he who never sweated.

Then he withdrew into his thoughts, assuming, while Ambrosio trembled and nervously jotted down the essential points of Hitler's speech, which Colonel Montezemolo translated softly for him, a distracted attitude that clearly revealed the lack of importance he attached at that point to what the Führer was saying. So much so that Bastianini tried to put an end to that painful morning and, *first and foremost*, to Hitler's monotonous and often contemptuous monologue. Lunch was scheduled for 1:00 p.m. Instead of waiting for the meeting to end, the undersecretary, confident that he could count on the unwitting help of the formalism of the Germans in charge of the ceremony, resorted to the expedient of ordering lunch to be prepared, without worrying whether the meeting was over or not.

Five minutes before one o'clock—Alfieri recalls ^{this too}—one of Hitler's aides, a handsome young man, tall and strutting in his elegant uniform, approached him and whispered something in his ear. As if he hadn't heard anything, Hitler continued his impassioned speech. He admitted that it was a particularly difficult moment for the Axis, but that it would certainly be overcome if all countries, and therefore also and above all Italy, showed firmness of spirit and a fanatical will to resist and fight.

Five minutes later, the aide-de-camp approached Hitler again and whispered something in his ear with respectful automatism. The Führer interrupted himself, annoyed. We thought it was some important and urgent communication; instead, it was about lunch: it was set for 1:00 p.m., and German protocol, considering Hitler a guest of Mussolini, intervened to ensure that punctuality was respected.

And so the meeting, which had lasted two hours and during which Mussolini had never opened his mouth, came to an abrupt end.

From that moment on, the meeting rapidly descended into chaos. Discouraged, irritated, distressed, and concerned about the bombing of Rome, Mussolini decided after breakfast to end the meeting and instructed De Cesare to prepare for departure at ⁴ p.m. Upon hearing this news, Alfieri, Ambrosio, and Bastianini immediately went to him to protest his silence in the face of Hitler's tirade and the judgments he had expressed about Italy and its army, and above all for not having told him in no uncertain terms that the situation in Italy was such that it was no longer possible to prolong the resistance beyond, according to Ambrosio, a month. A lively discussion ensued, in which Alfieri and, above all, Ambrosio appear to have been the main protagonists.

The latter had a meeting before the plenary session. with ^{Keitel}, during which the Chief of Staff of the Wehrmacht had responded in very vague terms to his request for information on operations in Russia ("at the Russian front, we will wear down and weaken the enemy; meanwhile, we will prepare new forces that will allow us to act next winter on the southern front, in the Balkans, and in Italy"). As for Italy, on the one hand, he told him that if he decided on "resistance to the bitter end," other forces would be sent to Sicily, but, on the other hand, he stated in no uncertain terms that Germany was unable to send any air forces other than those already promised by the Führer, nor did it have any armored divisions available, and that other reinforcements would not be available for a couple of months, so that for the time being he had to transfer the divisions stationed in the center-north to the south.

"including the Alpine divisions and those being reconstituted": "northern Italy will then be garrisoned with German divisions that can gradually be brought in." Hitler was certainly no more ^{encouraging}. As for the air force, Fera complained about the "inept and cowardly behavior" of Italian ground personnel, the lack of good airports, and the poor organization of existing ones: "The losses on the fields in Italy in recent times have been enormous. I cannot give more than what is produced." If the tone had not changed, no more aircraft would have been sent:

These are the conditions necessary for the missions to continue; otherwise, we can continue to send 100-200 aircraft per month for months on end, but we will never make up for the losses, and in a year we will have lost the 2,000 aircraft requested.

Losses in combat are inevitable, but destruction on the ground is caused only by carelessness.

As for Sicily, the problem for him too was whether to defend it to the bitter end or give it up. "For our part, we will send everything we can, but only subject to the essential conditions."

With regard to Sicily in particular, he said during the plenary meeting², I speak as a soldier. If supplies allow, we must resist and then possibly move on to a counterattack.

Air strikes against shipping must continue; submarine action may be increased if necessary. But security must be ensured in southern Italy, otherwise the forces on the island will be lost and in that case it would be better to withdraw them and fight on the peninsula. If possible, the island must be defended and, if possible, counterattacked. Of course, the necessary resources are currently insufficient; there are few weapons, insufficient tanks, and meager reserves of ammunition and fuel. Therefore, in my opinion, it is necessary to secure supplies first and foremost.

In Sicily, tanks are less necessary than infantry. Tanks are used for movement and attack; they don't have much defensive capability. Infantry with heavy and light weapons is better. Paratroopers are not real infantry either.

However, I repeat, security is needed in the Strait area and further back.

If you want to fight in Sicily, you have to do so with fanaticism.

Essentially, there are two requirements:

- 1) Ensure the security of the Strait of Messina (with anti-aircraft artillery coming from Germany and part of that available in Italy). It is not excluded that with the arrival of 60-80 anti-aircraft batteries, including 123 batteries, traffic can be ensured.

The enemy air force will not fail to act but will suffer heavy losses.

- 2) Prevent the enemy from carrying out actions against embarkation and disembarkation ports.

These are essential prerequisites for resistance in Sicily...

We must act quickly, otherwise the enemy will attempt some action in the Strait area.

Of no less importance is the strengthening of defenses in Calabria and

Puglia.

If, on the other hand, it is decided to fight on the peninsula, then it is pointless to send more forces to Sicily. Motorized and armored divisions are extremely expensive. Losing such a division, which takes a year to prepare, is like losing a treasure.

If we want to hold on to Sicily, it will be necessary to send more German troops.

However, it is also necessary to organize southern Italy (lookout services, camps, etc.).

The camps must be kept in perfect order. Only then will it be possible to do something; otherwise, it will not be possible.

We cannot send 200 aircraft in a month and lose two-thirds of them on the ground.

Therefore, a decision must be made regarding Sicily. For our part, we will send everything we can, but only subject to the indispensable conditions.

Make sure everything goes well behind the scenes, otherwise it would be a catastrophe. If the plan succeeds, in two or three months the British could find themselves in serious trouble. Of course, using every means available. Then Sicily could become for the enemy what Stalingrad was for us. But a clear decision must be made.

If I have to express my opinion, I will say that I have always been opposed to postponing a task that has proven to be successful. It is better to fight where we are. Today, Italy is being defended in Sicily, so serious decisions are necessary.

In Germany, too, I had to demand radical, severe measures (general mobilization with 3 million civilians mobilized, including 15-year-old boys and mothers of one or two children). But in return, only one feeling, only one desire arose: "revenge." A true

the central and then only the northern one... What was needed was to draw "iron consequences" from what had happened and was happening and to adopt "very harsh measures." The ^{German} report is more explicit in this regard than the Italian one, as if Colonel Montezemolo, faced with Hitler's accusations, refused to record them. The time for tolerance and laxity had to end. Italy had to follow Germany's example, mobilize 15-year-olds as auxiliaries, employ the elderly and the very young in the workforce, and, as for women, since many were already employed in industry, extend mobilization to the middle and upper social classes. Officers, even experienced ones, who had lost control of their nerves were to be dismissed because in the troops

Officers must maintain morale. Just as the poor quality of a local leader causes a negative atmosphere in a local party group, so too must the poor atmosphere among the troops be attributed to the officers. Everyone must maintain the right spirit among the troops.

When a nation has become incredulous and looks despondently at its own destiny, very harsh measures must be taken, even in personal matters. People want something to happen, and by adopting energetic measures, they would be rallied as soon as possible. Stalin similarly restored order, only through the harshest measures, to the domestic front that was beginning to falter.

Still reeling from what Keitel had told him and Hitler's words, discouraged, irritated, and humiliated by them, Ambrosio had been the most outspoken, especially after Alfieri had, in a sense, paved the way for him. Ortona, to whom Bastianini reported the discussion immediately after its conclusion, summarized its progress as follows:

Above all, Ambrosio paints a literally catastrophic picture of the situation, describing it as completely unsustainable and such as to predict a military solution unfavorable to us within fifteen days [Alfieri had attributed a one-month forecast to him a few moments earlier]. The Duce receives the harsh blow with evident anxiety. He rises up and describes what will be the inexorable action of the British. Ambrosio is severe and unyielding, even openly suggesting political solutions, to which Bastianini replies: "If the Chief of Staff is of this opinion, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the person of the Duce, will have to decide accordingly." He concludes by telling the Duce that he must speak unequivocally to Hitler.

According to ^{Alfieri's} testimony, Ambrosio (who must have been obsessed with the idea that the military crisis, if not stopped in time,

could also become institutional and social) told Mussolini that, given this situation,

We had to have the courage to face it head on. Let me repeat that it is necessary and urgent that you speak with Hitler to find a solution and a way out. If the possibility of disengagement must be considered, it is much better that this happen while the state still maintains its structure, its institutions are still functioning, and the government is still able to enforce its decisions; while the police still have their collars! Tomorrow may be too late...

As for Bastianini's testimony in his ^{memoirs}, it is extremely laconic and adds nothing to what we know from Ortona and Alfieri (Mussolini, for his part, does not even mention the discussion either in *Pensieri pontini e sardi* or in *Storia di un anno*; as for Ambrosio, in his testimony before the Commission of Inquiry into the failure to defend Rome he too was extremely laconic: "I expressed my surprise that he had said nothing to Hitler about our country and suggested that he do so on the way to Treviso"). in practice, it adds only one detail to what has already been said: the undisguised irritation with which Hitler received the news, brought to him as soon as the discussion between Mussolini, Ambrosio, Alfieri, and Bastianini himself had ended, that the "Duce" had decided not to resume the meeting and was waiting for him in the garden of the villa. However, it is Alfieri who provides the most significant testimony regarding Mussolini's position, explaining Ortona's reference to his polemical "rising up" against Ambrosio's reproaches. Upon hearing his first remarks, the "Duce" had - according to Alfieri - a sudden outburst,

Then he recovered and accepted the discussion. He invited us to sit down, which was absolutely unusual.

"Do you perhaps believe," he said animatedly and excitedly, "that this problem has not been stirring in my troubled spirit for some time? Behind the mask of my apparent impassivity lies a deep, nagging torment. I admit the hypothesis: breaking away from Germany. It's simple; one day, at a given time, a radio message is sent to the enemy. What will the consequences be? The enemy will rightly demand capitulation. Are we prepared to wipe out twenty years of regime in one fell swoop? To nullify the achievements of such long and arduous work? To acknowledge our first military and political defeat? To disappear from the world stage? And then, it is easy to say: break away from Germany. What attitude would Hitler take? Do you perhaps believe that he would leave us free to act?"

After a few more remarks, the small meeting broke up. Contrary to what Ambrosio and the others had expected, when he reached Hitler in the garden

No, Mussolini did not take him aside to talk to him. The two got into the car and, once they reached Feltre, boarded the train. In Treviso, each boarded his own plane. Ambrosio, on the train, had a second conversation with Keitel, which was no less disappointing than ^{the first}. Referring back to what the Führer had said that morning, the field marshal, when asked when Italy could expect the promised aid, replied "as soon as possible," but immediately added: "However, it is essential that all measures be taken so that the defense of Sicily can be implemented on the basis of these *three essential points*," and he listed them bluntly:

- i) tactical point of view: increase in forces to allow the establishment of a robust line and the withdrawal of mobile forces (15th and Goering) to the second line;
- 2) operational point of view: (ensuring supplies and creating a strong defense in Calabria and Puglia);
- 3) organizational point of view: firmly and rigorously adopting measures to give maximum freedom and authority to the military authorities of southern Italy, with the aim of organizing and strengthening the defense: airfields, railways, roads, depots, etc.; the war must be totalitarian, suppressing all private interests: everything for the war and for defense...

And he had entrenched himself on these points, impervious to any other issue, repeating what Ambrosio had said to him: "if there is perfect agreement on *the three points*, I have no doubt that the Führer will make everything possible available," "there are only two alternatives: either to fight with all means to hold our positions in Sicily with the prospect of then going on the offensive, or, if we do not intend to do this, we might as well not send any more reinforcements; this point must be clarified as soon as possible... These are serious decisions, but half measures cannot be taken..."² All this was said in a tone, with an arrogance and an obvious unwillingness to concede anything or budge an inch from his position, which revealed his disappointment and irritation at the fact that Hitler had not only failed to raise the issue of single command during the plenary meeting, as requested by the OKW, but when, a moment earlier, at Feltre station, he had tried to persuade him to do so at least during his meeting with Mussolini on his way to Treviso, he had curtly replied that the conditions for this to happen did not exist:

⁽¹⁾On July 20, the Supreme Commander drafted a

"brief summary" of the discussions and *military issues* dealt with in Feltre. See NAW, *Collection of Italian Military Records*, I.T.,

Before Hitler gave Keitel this answer, the two dictators had been alone for only a short time; their only opportunity to speak face to face had been after the plenary meeting had been suspended, when they had a quick breakfast together—during which Mussolini had been absent for some time to speak on the phone with Rome and get details of the bombing of the capital—in a room other than the one where the two delegations were having breakfast. According to *Pensieri pontini e sardi*, on this occasion Hitler communicated "two essential facts" to Mussolini: "1) submarine warfare would be resumed with new means; 2) at the end of August, the retaliatory air fleet would begin operating against London, which would be wiped off the face of the earth in a week." To which Mussolini replied "that in anticipation of these attacks, Italy's defenses must be reinforced in every way possible." And, unless he spoke to him about it later on the train, he had to—as he would say a dozen days later to Admiral Maugeri, who was accompanying him to Ponza—once again urge him to make peace with Russia at any cost, renouncing everything he had conquered, including Ukraine.

If it is credible that, as General Warlimont wrote, upon returning to Germany Hitler believed he had "brought Mussolini back into line," Mussolini back into line, it is impossible to believe that he had reached this conclusion before meeting with him alone, as this is the only rational explanation for the fact that during the plenary meeting and again at lunch (as his words to Keitel seem to suggest) he did not raise the issue of unified command. Hence, in our opinion, the need to fall back on an explanation that is not only rational but also psychological, which, moreover, is indirectly suggested by Warlimont's memoirs, where he writes that the main purpose of the meeting in Feltre for the Führer was "to strengthen the back of his friend and ally and to secure his further support," but at the same time—as we have already mentioned—even before meeting him and thus being able to verify his state of mind and gauge his intentions in person, Hitler—concerned about the consequences this would have on the prestige of the Duce (and, we might add, on his political stance)—had been hesitant to adopt Jodl's conclusions and proposals. So far, we are still on entirely rational ground, but in order to truly understand Hitler's behavior in Feltre, we believe it is necessary to take a step further.

and assume that psychological factors probably also influenced it, namely the evident moral crisis caused in Mussolini by the news of the bombing of ^{Rome}, which arrived—as has been said—when Hitler, having exhausted the preliminary and general issues, had just moved on to discuss specific matters relating to military operations in Sicily, the Italian situation, and the measures to deal with it. Although he apparently continued undeterred in his tirade at the time, it cannot be ruled out that the agitation of his "great friend" and ally, added to his previous hesitations, ultimately led Hitler not to raise the issue of unified command, which, after all, would have forced him to mention Rommel, who was particularly unpopular with Mussolini. This was partly to avoid exacerbating his pain, out of human understanding for a man whom he admired and, in his own way, loved despite everything, and partly out of fear that in that state of mind Mussolini might say or do something that would precipitate a crisis between the two regimes, something that Hitler did not want, being well aware of the negative political consequences it would have from all points of view. Above all, if we accept the hypothesis of a combination of rational and psychological motivations, even the little we know about the conversation Hitler and Mussolini had on the train from Feltre to Treviso becomes more understandable.

While in *Storia di un anno* Mussolini would not have said anything on this subject (except that when bidding farewell to Hitler at the airport he would have said to him, "The cause is common, Führer!"), his *Pensieri pontini e sardi* (not intended for publication) are less ^{laconic}:

It was only during the hour spent on the train with the Führer that I made it clear to him that at that time Italy had to bear the full weight of two empires, Great Britain and the United States, and that under this weight there was a danger of being crushed, that the bombing of cities not only shook the morale of the population, but also seriously damaged war production and caused serious disruption to all social life. I told him once again that the African campaign would have taken a different course if we had had, if not air superiority, at least an air force as strong as that of the enemy. I also told him that tension within the country had become great and dangerous. He replied that the Italian crisis was a crisis of leadership and that he would send more air reinforcements and new divisions to defend the peninsula. He declared that the defense of Italy was also of the utmost interest to Germany.

The tone of the conversation was always friendly, and we parted on good terms. Then the Führer's plane took off. As I accompanied Keitel to his plane, I said to him, "Send us everything we need: remember that we are on the same ship!"

Nor, all things considered, is Mussolini's version unreliable. It is in fact confirmed by what Bastianini and Alfieri report the "Duce" told them in the few minutes that passed between the takeoff of the German delegation's planes and that of his own plane. According to the former, who, after Hitler's departure, immediately approached him with Ambrosio to find out what they had said to each other and whether he had spoken to him about Italy's inability to continue the war, he said:

The question is not this, but how he could break away from Germany. In this regard, a note by Pietromarchi dated July 22 is significant: "There is no doubt that he would like to 'break away' from Germany. But how?"¹.

It is difficult to believe that, when he went to Feltre, Mussolini deluded himself into thinking he could convince Hitler to accept the idea of general peace negotiations or even to allow Italy to negotiate its own exit from the war, so the fact that he did not raise this issue is hardly surprising. Perhaps he wanted to make one last attempt to resolve the conflict in the East and try to explicitly raise the issue of Germany's mistakes and failures with regard to Italy, so as to try to establish some "firm points" in order to save face to some extent when he managed to find a way to disengage. But above all, he wanted to buy time to find a way to disengage without running the risk of being militarily overwhelmed and politically ousted (because, as we will see shortly, it was impossible for him not to realize what was brewing in Rome) or of alarming the Germans to such an extent that they would beat him to it and occupy Italy. And since he needed to buy time, the only thing to do was to reassure Hitler of his "loyalty" and obtain from him the aid that he knew full well the German High Command would certainly not give him, but which it would have to give him at least in part if the Führer ordered it, and which he absolutely needed in order to buy time, both militarily and politically.

This explains his behavior in Feltre. He endured Hitler's indictment, "thus leading him to believe that he recognized the validity of the criticisms and serious remarks" made against the army and Italians in general, in order to be able to ask him for further assistance. And he obtained it, even if the very short time between the meeting and Mussolini's ouster from the government does not allow us to say whether, after assuring him of it, Hitler would not have changed his mind and, above all, would not have ended up yielding to pressure to the contrary from his military leaders, the real losers at Feltre. This explanation, moreover, is confirmed by the assessment of the meeting given by a balanced and experienced man such as Ortona:

To sum up the talks, I would conclude that: 1) the Führer made general references to continued collaboration; 2) the military did not reach an agreement; 3) the long conversation between the Führer and the Duce did not, however, result in Italy's "surrender" to German occupation. At least, this seemed to me to be the general atmosphere, confirmed also by the Germans' acquiescence to our communiqué.

both from the most widespread concerns at Palazzo Chigi. In fact, while for some of Bastianini's collaborators (typically Vitetti and a large part of the old Ciano group), there was now only one problem, the same one that plagued the military leadership and Ambrosio in particular: to end the state of war as soon as possible and, therefore, to get rid of Mussolini and fascism and negotiate an armistice with the Allies; for others (for example, Pietromarchi and Bastianini himself, who, thanks to his relationship with Ambrosio, was more aware of the gravity of the military situation, but also realized the simplistic and dangerous nature of his position), it was much more complex, to be resolved as soon as possible, but without rushing things. That both sides were deluding themselves is now beyond question; however, in order to truly understand the events and behaviors that led to July 25 and then September 8 and, for what interests us most here, Mussolini's personal behavior, it is essential to understand the motivations and concerns that underlay the various behaviors. In this regard, we find a page from Pietromarchi's diary (the same from which we drew the statement that Mussolini wanted to break away from Germany but did not know how to do so) which, in our opinion, clearly illustrates not only the positions of Pietromarchi and Bastianini themselves, but also the widespread concerns at Palazzo Chigi in the days immediately following the meeting in Feltre and, more generally, the mood of those days, the fears, hopes, and contradictions that were at their origin. Pietromarchi wrote:

The hopes that many had placed in the King are fading... Trust in the Crown is disappearing. The King is waiting for Mussolini to resign. He will never take any initiative himself. The army commanded by Ambrosio, a Piedmontese and loyal supporter of the House of Savoy, is under the King's command. Every decision is reserved solely for the Duce. He holds and will hold the fate of the country in his hands until the very end. Behind him is the ally who keeps him in his place. The truth is that even Mussolini is not free to make his own decisions. All this keeps the country in suspense. It is now clear that the game is lost and that there is not even the slightest glimmer of hope of salvation. The myth of German invincibility has fallen. Now the nation desires only one thing: that, since it must fall, it should fall united. It will not accept being divided into two zones of occupation under enemy armies. This would turn the country into a desert, destroyed by one and

by the other adversary and with the same terrible consequences that the breakup of unity brought about in France. In other words, Italy demands that there be no *debellatio* but that negotiations continue while there is still time. To do this, a non-political government must be formed before the Allies land on the peninsula and the Germans line up on the Po. For

lasso. The same mood prevailed at Court. This was also confirmed to me by my penultimate conversation with the King.

After what we have said in attempting to reconstruct the attitude of Victor Emmanuel III, the various components of the regime, and the anti-fascist groups, their interconnections, and mutual contacts, there is little left to say, both with regard to Mussolini in particular and to conclude the outline of the general picture in which the events of July 24 and 25 took place.

As far as the general picture is concerned, only two facts are worth mentioning. The first is Hidaka's visit to Bastianini on July 23. Concerned by the flurry of rumors about the results of the Feltre meeting, which had been sparked by its extreme brevity and the laconic nature of the communiqué issued at its conclusion, by the increasingly evident signs of disintegration of the regime, and by the news about how the Grand Council had been convened for the 24th and about the divisions among its members, the Japanese ambassador—despite having had a meeting with Mussolini two days earlier, during which he had been briefly informed about the Feltre meeting—had received instructions from Tokyo to ask the "Duce" for his point of view "both with regard to the Russian front and, in particular, in connection with the Mediterranean front." He did not limit himself to asking Bastianini to arrange a meeting with Mussolini as soon as possible, but—as can be easily deduced from the "note" that the undersecretary sent to the "Duce" that same day—he tried to obtain from him an initial assessment of the situation, receiving, however, essentially formal, general, and ultimately optimistic answers. Thus, the episode might seem of little importance if Hidaka had not gone beyond the normal, generic assurances about Japan's willingness to "meet Italy halfway in some way" with regard to his government's interest in the "grave" military and political situation in Europe and had not brought up the subject of Japanese-Soviet relations, specifying that "Japan is always ready and at the same time very cautious towards Russia" and informing Bastianini that in the previous days Molotov had told the Japanese ambassador that he had refused to grant the air bases requested by the Anglo-Americans and that relations between the USSR and the Allies, despite being "close cooperation," remained "basically the same as before." This explains why, on the morning of the 25th, with everything that was going on, Mussolini found the time to grant Hidaka's request for an audience (not initially on the calendar), summoning him urgently.

emergency meeting at Palazzo Venezia. The second event consists of a passage by Ambrosio on Kesselring on the afternoon of July 24. While the Grand Council was beginning its work at Palazzo Venezia, Ambrosio met at Palazzo Vidoni, where he had summoned him, with Field Marshal

"to bring a few things to his attention," but in reality to ask him just one thing, to which it is difficult to imagine he hoped to receive a sincere answer, but which at that moment must have concerned him so much that he was willing to try every means possible to understand its significance. In recent days, while the Italians had made "every effort" to withdraw their troops from the capital, so as to facilitate the Holy See's attempts to protect it from further bombing, "German troops had entered Rome to take up positions in the city." Why? Von Rintelen, who was accompanying Kesselring, replied that they were only two motorized engineering companies requested by General Di Raimondo to help restore the railway network, which had been destroyed by the bombing on July 1. It is likely, if not certain, that in the confusion of those days the Supreme Command knew nothing of General Di Raimondo's request, but what matters is the alarm that the arrival of German troops had caused Ambrosio. Even considering his Piedmontese bureaucratic meticulousness, it is difficult to believe that at that moment Ambrosio had nothing else to worry about but the 'open city', going so far as to summon Kesselring, with whom he had continuous, almost daily contact, so that there can only be one explanation for his action: the fear that the Germans, faced with the precipitating Italian political crisis and having learned of the convening of the Grand Council, would prepare to intervene in support of Mussolini or even to take the situation into their own hands, as, moreover, some "reliable" rumors of those days suggested. But from this point of view, Ambrosio's fears were unjustified. A week earlier, Berlin had feared that the Italian situation, and *above all* the military situation, was on the verge of collapse: so much so that Hitler had felt he had to "open Mussolini's eyes"² However, despite all its shadows, the meeting in Feltre had allayed these fears and, above all, had led to the belief that there were no imminent risks. As far as the political situation was concerned, the reports sent in those days by von Mackensen to von Ribbentrop⁵ must have made a significant contribution to the establishment of this conviction. Based essentially on information and assessments

Farinacci's statements, the ambassador ended up convincing himself and Berlin that, politically speaking, the situation was under the control of Farinacci's supporters (among whom he also counted Scorza) and was moving in the direction indicated to Feltre by Hitler. Von Mackensen was not alone in thinking this, as von Rintelen, informing his superiors of the Grand Council's meeting on the 24th, also practically endorsed the "rumors" that at that meeting "a group" (evidently Farinacci's) "would demand that the state be led with a stronger and more energetic hand"

Paradoxically, it could be said that in the days immediately following the meeting in Feltre, while – once news of the Grand Council's convening on the afternoon of the 24th became known – agitation at the top of the regime and around the Quirinale and within the Fascist leadership group around the "Duce" reached its peak, the person who seemed least concerned was Mussolini. This was despite the fact that he should have been on his guard for some time, thanks to information coming from various police forces and individual Fascist representatives who were increasingly warning him about what was being "plotted" against him and urging him to act, to crush the maneuvers that were being hatched against him on all sides and not to trust Victor Emmanuel III.

Some of those who would be the protagonists of the events of July 24 and 25 had been under surveillance for some time, if not always. Mussolini knew full well that Ciano was rebelling, considered the war irretrievably lost, and was acting independently to establish contact with the Allies. Mussolini knew this well and must also have known that the Germans were aware of some of these contacts (those with Osborne in the Vatican); he also knew that Ciano was speaking out more and more strongly against him and that, even as ambassador to the Holy See, he continued to have relations with the Supreme Command. Badoglio was surrounded by a host of informants (including some of high rank and completely above suspicion), thanks to whom Mussolini had a wealth of information at his disposal (which, having increased towards the end of 1942, became overwhelming in April-May), not always accurate, but nevertheless such as to leave no doubt that the marshal, while moving with extreme caution ("wait until the pear is ripe," reads a report dated February 16), was at the center of a dense network of contacts and that not only many high-ranking army officers looked to him, but also

"well-known industrialists from the North." Equally numerous were the reports and "briefings" on the pressure that was being exerted or attempted to be exerted on the sovereign, the crown prince, and Acquarone to persuade them to dismiss Mussolini, and on the multiplier effect of this pressure, which, by July, had led to growing public discontent, the detachment of increasingly large sectors of the country from the regime, and the fear that this would translate into subversive movements as a result of the deteriorating military situation and the aerial bombardments (in the aftermath of the bombing of Rome on the 19th, an informant concluded his report by stating in no uncertain terms that after it, "plans for resistance" now appeared to be "the ideas of madmen") and the news of the 'failure' of the Feltre meeting and the 'total passivity' of the 'Duce' towards Hitler². Although often inaccurate and based on second- and third-hand information, the number and substantial convergence of these reports were such that they left no doubt not only about the seriousness of the political crisis, but also about the fact that the way out of it was now, for everyone, the removal of Mussolini from government and that everyone, in one way or another, were working to ensure that the king, and with him the military, took power into their own hands.

In the fascist camp, the first to warn Mussolini was probably Preziosi. Since November 1942, the editor of *La vita italiana* had sent him several long memos, either written by himself or his colleagues or drafted by the Center for Political Preparation for the Study of the Jewish Problem in Trieste, in which he denounced in the harshest terms both the crisis afflicting the country and the regime and a whole series of cases of inefficiency, "intelligence" with anti-fascism and "betrayals" that were "hatched in the shadows." Referring to the situation in 1917 after Caporetto and comparing it with the current one, he suggested measures to strengthen the internal front "since the prolongation of the war can only be faced if the internal front resists." All the regime's actions - as stated in one of them sent to Mussolini shortly before Scorza's appointment as secretary of the PNF - had to

"focus on the masses and the petty bourgeoisie, emphasizing the social character of the Revolution, arousing the sincere feelings of the people, appealing to their honor, their national pride, the defense of their territory, and their hatred of foreigners"; the aristocracy, the upper middle class, and the anti-fascist bourgeoisie had to be controlled in all their activities, dominated with an iron fist, terrorized, and prevented from enjoying a whole series of advantages without the knowledge of the "Duce" or "for his sake."

excessive leniency"; on the contrary, "German-style justice (with their backs against the wall)" should be applied to them. The names of Ciano, Bottai, Grandi, Cini, and Badoglio were clearly indicated as those of potential "traitors," and Preziosi asked Mussolini to reject "any family sentimentality" and old camaraderie and instead surround himself "with men who may be poor but are animated by faith, who are prepared, even if they do not already have a career" and, if he wanted representative men, to return "to fascists such as Arpinati, Turati, etc., who were widely respected in the country and who were victims of palace cliques." Apart from the personal antipathy that the "Duce" notoriously harbored toward Preziosi, the tone of these memoirs (which certainly did not lack denunciations and arguments with which he agreed) and their fanatical insistence on tracing everything back to the maneuvers of international Judaism were not, however, the most suitable for "opening Mussolini's eyes," as their author or inspirer promised. Thus, they ended up being nothing more than the classic rain on wet ground or had no effect whatsoever (except, perhaps, a certain influence on Senise's dismissal), even in cases where they contained information that, if properly checked, could have allowed Mussolini to take action and use it politically, perhaps even with the king. A typical example is a reference in one of them to the November 12, 1942, contacts in Switzerland between Badoglio elements and the British.

In addition to Preziosi, who continued until the end to warn Mussolini against everyone (against Ciano and Grandi, but also against Buffarini Guidi and even Farinacci) and who, it seems, when he learned of the request to convene the Grand Council, had tried to dissuade him from granting it, another who had repeatedly warned him was Suardo. Since March 14, the president of the Senate had written to him to denounce the preparation of a "military plot led by Badoglio" with ramifications even in the upper house; On May 11, he returned to the charge, proposing that he adjourn the legislature and thus put an end to the "conspiracies" that were being hatched and that had as their reference point the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations; and in the second half of July, as we have already mentioned, he had informed Mussolini of the collection of signatures promoted by Edoardo Rotigliano to request the convening of the Senate in plenary session and, having received his order, had deemed the request unacceptable, then he too had tried to influence Scorza so that the Grand Council would not meet and, finally, a few minutes before the i-

At the beginning of the session, he reportedly told Mussolini that he was certain that during the session, the plot organized against him by ^{Grandi} would be revealed.

These warnings were followed by others. In June, the federal representative of Parma, Mario Macola, sent Scorza a report (which the secretary of the National Fascist Party forwarded to Mussolini in the form of a "note") denouncing the existence of a monarchist military conspiracy (behind which seemed to be the Princess of Piedmont, Cardinal Schuster, and some military and intellectual figures) to overthrow the regime, arrest Mussolini and members of the government, dissolve the party, and place the young Prince Vittorio Emanuele on the throne (in favor of whom Vittorio Emanuele III and his son Umberto would abdicate) under the regency of Princess Maria José and the Badoglio government, and conclude an armistice. In the following days, Farinacci had in turn informed the 'Duce', first in fairly general terms, then naming Grandi, Badoglio, Acquerone, and Ambrosio, that a conspiracy against him was underway. Another person who wanted to speak to him—it is unclear whether to warn him in general terms or to report some specific fact—was Augusto Turati: "We need to speak clearly to Mussolini before the others make their move," he reportedly told De Begnac, begging him to convey his request to the

"Duce"⁴. After the landing in Sicily, warnings to remain vigilant, denunciations, exhortations to act promptly against his enemies and not to fall into the trap set for him with the request to convene the Grand Council had multiplied and become more pressing. In addition to those from Preziosi, Suardo, Farinacci (still in the late afternoon of the 23rd), and Scorza (who informed him that a telephone call between Acquerone and Badoglio had been intercepted in which there was talk of "packing up the Duce" on leaving

ta from the next ^{royal audience}1), of Dinaie, it is worth mentioning a letter that Alessandro Melchiori sent him on the 24th to inform him that he had spoken with Graziarli, who had told him: "Be very careful with Badoglio, because he is capable of anything and has only one goal: to become head of the government"². And, if we are to believe a testimony given later to Francesco Grossi by Franz Pagliani, who informed Scorza and then Mussolini, on July 23, even General Carboni made a vague reference to Pagliani about a "plan" against the regime, letting him understand that he was ready to crush it if Mussolini asked him to. Finally, we cannot overlook the increasingly exaggerated warnings and explicit accusations against Ciano, Badoglio, Grandi, Bastianini "and their comrades" that Rachele Mussolini poured out on her husband almost daily ("Arrest them all before you start!" she reportedly told him on the 24th as he left Villa Torlonia to attend the Grand Council meeting), and not only on him, since on July 17 she went so far as to communicate to Dollmann 'her frank, urgent warning to be wary of her son-in-law and his plans'.

Part of these warnings and the "information" on which they are based were based (and which were often nothing more than echoes, suggestions of the endless rumors that were now circulating in the country) were essentially the result of the tension and overexcitement in which those sectors of the party that did not want to resign themselves to defeat now lived. They thought that a comeback based on political and social mobilization was still possible, as well as patriotic, mobilization of the masses and the use of Jacobin-style measures against defeatists and "saboteurs," and attributed the blame for everything to "betrayal" of the upper classes, the old enemies of fascism and, not infrequently, the Church, to corruption, ambition and the desire to survive politically after the collapse of the regime and its discrediting, for which the hierarchs bore the greatest responsibility. A typical example is the reaction of Scorza's chief of staff, Prefect Guglielmo Montani, who on July 16, exasperated by the optimistic conformism and logomachy of a group of federalists from southern Italy gathered to discuss the situation in their provinces, went to Palazzo Venezia and handed De Cesare an angry letter for Mussolini in which he said, "If you do not immediately shoot Ciano, Badoglio, and Marcello Petacci, currency trafficker in Spain, in fifteen days you will no longer have any followers in Italy."

It is understandable that Mussolini did not attach importance to these outbursts and was in fact irritated by them. What is much less understandable is that he displayed the same attitude in other cases, which were more serious or which, in any case, should have prompted him, if not to take action, at least to be on his guard and try to better understand the basis for the warnings and information he was receiving. In fact, there is no evidence of this.

To Farinacci, who had told him about the conspiracy that, according to his sources, Grandi, Badoglio, Ambrosio, and Acquarone were plotting, he had simply replied, with a mixture of boredom and sarcasm, "You always see betrayal everywhere," and dropped the subject. In general, his response was and would remain until the end: "You have to be wary of detective novels." Not only did he give this response to anyone who raised the issue with him—making it a sort of obligatory reply, like the sovereign with his "have faith in your king"—but, in a certain sense, he went so far as to theorize it: on June 24, in his speech to the PNF leadership, referring to the "Macola case," he said: "The federal leader of Parma is Macola, a good, loyal, serious man; well, the federal leader of Parma takes the trouble to send the party secretary a detective novel of this kind, a very detective novel..." Only with his wife did he sometimes deviate from this attitude. On the evening of July 20, for example, during one of his usual tirades against the traitors of all kinds who surrounded him, and in particular against Badoglio who, according to him, even had the telephones of Villa Torlonia monitored, he replied: "But Rachele, it's the American tanks that worry me, not Badoglio's control or the intrigues of others..." Only with a few of the very few old friends he still trusted did he open up a little more. At the end of June, with Dinaie, who had also warned him about the coup that was brewing and who was convinced that his "dogmatic disbelief" in the face of every warning and denunciation was the result of resignation to the fate he felt was looming over him he said, "I will have a good way of finding out about all this massive conspiracy, if it really exists, I will have the means to ascertain it, and soon," and added—as we have already seen—that he hoped the "conspirators" would decide to come out into the open, so that he could get rid of them "in ten minutes or a couple of hours." With Morgagni, in whom he had complete confidence (the president of Stefani would have been one of the very few

simi, who, upon hearing the news of Mussolini's defenestration and arrest, committed suicide), on July 17, had been more cryptic and at the same time more explicit. This is hardly surprising, given that since he had spoken with Dinaie, the situation had become much more serious: the Allies had landed in Sicily and were spreading across the island, German resistance to truly committing to helping Italy was now more than evident, political 'unease' had grown and had also infected the leaders of fascism and the closest collaborators of the 'Duce', who just the day before had ended up - as we have seen - authorizing Bastianini to sound out the Allies' intentions.

The Germans, he told Morgagni⁽¹⁾, are still strong and could intervene effectively to stabilize and perhaps resolve the situation in Italy, which is now seriously compromised. But they no longer trust us. In order to intervene, they want effective command of the entire Italian front, including the internal front. And this is a condition that neither the Italian people, nor the king, nor myself could accept.

It is necessary to continue fighting even if all hope is now lost. But everyone will abandon me: the people and the king, who have always rejected those who do not bring fortune and power. And this is logical, I dare say natural. Unfortunately, even those whom I have given a name in the register of recent Italian history and whose moral and material fortune I have created will leave me.

In a few hours or a few days, I will be alone, deciding for everyone, perhaps against everyone.

After the meeting with Morgagni, there was the meeting in Feltre and the clash with Ambrosio on the evening of the 20th, two events that must have further confirmed Mussolini in his assessment of the situation. Yet there is no shortage of direct and indirect indications suggesting that, despite knowing the agenda that Grandi would submit to the Grand Council and the mood of most of its members, Mussolini did not attach much importance to the meeting of the supreme organ of Fascism, if he did not even consider it - despite receiving "alarmist" reports from various quarters and he had been advised not to convene it and, in any case, to be on guard - a ploy to satisfy and silence the most restless, 'look them in the eye' and bring them back into line. In fact, it is natural to think that the response he gave, in a "surprised and almost amused" tone, on the morning of July 24 to his wife, who had asked him

Once again, if the meeting was really necessary, it could have been dictated by the desire to reassure her and avoid yet another argument

"about that group of wretches" and "traitors": "and why shouldn't it be? It will be an explanation among comrades, everyone will have their say... I don't see why I shouldn't ^{hold it}"¹. It is more difficult to consider in the same light the explanation he gave, shortly before the start of the meeting, to Suardo, who also warned him about what might happen: "You are catastrophic, Suardo, it will be an informative meeting." The fact that a heated and, therefore, lengthy meeting was not expected at all is demonstrated by the fact that, without specifying the time, his private secretary had scheduled the usual audience with Ambrosio for the evening to discuss the military situation.

In Ponza, on July 28, to the commander of *the Persephone*, Tazzari, refer- However, Mussolini's reaction was not to what had happened in the Grand Council, but to his arrest and transfer to Ponza, where he reportedly said, "Now that I am almost sixty years old, I realize that I am still as naive as a ^{boy}." According to Dinaie, he was instead in a state of deep resignation that made him incredulous and passive in the face of everything. Although it is true that he was increasingly prone to mood swings that made him oscillate between moments of optimism and extreme confidence in his ability to find a positive solution to the Italian drama and moments of extreme despondency and mistrust (which immediately affected him physically, as had been the case in Feltre and as would happen during the Grand Council meeting), neither of these explanations is convincing. Grandi, since his first interview in February 1945 with *Life* (which Vitetti, in his unpublished book on July 25 and September 1, would contest on many points, but, significantly, not on this statement, which could have given him the opportunity to accuse Grandi of wanting to create an adversary on a par with himself), was explicit in this regard: "Mussolini was described as a broken man... He was not. He was as vigorous as ever, physically strong, a keen fighter"⁴ Nor is his the only testimony in this regard. To understand Mussolini's behavior after Feltre and, *first and foremost*, the confidence with which he first addressed the Grand Council⁵ and then, despite what had happened, continued to

To think that the king would not have seized the opportunity to dismiss him, it is therefore necessary to find other explanations.

And in our opinion, there is only one explanation, which brings us back to the famous meeting on the morning of the 22nd with Vittorio Emanuele III. A meeting, mind you, which, despite the importance of the meeting in Feltre, the flurry of rumors it sparked, the clash with Ambrosio that followed, and the *shock* of the bombing of Rome, Mussolini refrained from anticipating, but - although aware of the negative effect of all these events on the sovereign and of the arguments they gave to those who wanted an immediate exit from the war - he postponed the usual audience for the royal signature until July 22. Thus, having ruled out the explanation of a resigned passivity that would have led him to suffer the events without further struggle, only two others remain: the unlikely one of absolute trust in the sovereign and the one that, before going to him, he wanted to prepare a sort of

A "firm point" on which to stand, with respect to both Victor Emmanuel III and the increasingly restless fascist hierarchy, namely to convene the Grand Council, so as to present himself at the Quirinale as someone who was sure he still enjoyed the consent of the supreme organ of fascism and who could, if necessary, even anticipate to the sovereign the decisions he intended to have adopted two days later by the Grand Council. In this regard, it is significant that while Scorza issued the convocations for it on the 22nd, Mussolini gave him the order to proceed with them on the 21st, that is, before going to the sovereign. So the discussion essentially returns to *the vexed question* of what Vittorio Emanuele III and Mussolini actually said to each other on the morning of the 22nd and, therefore, to Badoglio's statements three months later, according to which, during the conversation, the Duce assured the sovereign that, 'in any case', he would break away from Germany 'by September 15'.

As we have already said, despite the extreme caution with which Badoglio's statements should generally be taken, this one is, in our opinion, extremely credible. On a factual level, so to speak, the following factors contribute to this credibility: a) the extremely confident tone with which the marshal made the statement, also calling Ambrosio, who was present at his speech and did not deny it, as a witness; b) the fact, as we have already mentioned, that Badoglio confirmed it before the Commission of Inquiry into the failure to defend Rome, adding that he believed he had received the news from the sovereign himself; c) the testimony of Mario Zamboni, who in his memoirs¹ reports that in the days immediately preceding the session of the Grand Council, in various Roman circles, including those of the Senate and the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, cir-

¹ See M. ZAMBONI, *Diary of a Coup d'État*, op. cit., July 1943.

there was a rumor (which Zamboni seems to believe was spread by Mussolini) that the "Duce" intended "to somehow end this war by mid-September"; d) finally, the fact that General Warlimont reports that, on his return from Feltre, Mussolini had informed the king "that he hoped to end the alliance with Germany in mid-September." This last testimony may seem the least significant, because it cannot be ruled out that Warlimont's source (who, moreover, speaks of testimonies in the plural) was Badoglio's speech of October 18; in reality, however, it cannot be underestimated either. As we shall see in detail in the next volume, various German political and military figures, starting with Hitler, did not hide their conviction, or at least their suspicion, in the weeks after July 25 and September 8 that Mussolini, after Feltre, had decided to break with Germany. This may have been the result of more or less personal conjectures and assessments, but also of information transmitted to Berlin by German secret services and agents in Italy or provided by intransigent fascist elements, and Warlimont referred to it.

If we accept the "Badoglio version," the only point that remains to be clarified was Mussolini, by telling Victor Emmanuel III that he would break away from Germany within two months, merely trying to buy time and avert the danger of the sovereign dismissing him immediately, or was he sincere, in other words, did he think he still had some cards left to play? For one thing seems certain, namely that he was now fully aware of the impossibility of continuing the war.

It is extremely unlikely that Mussolini only wanted to buy time, to survive politically for another couple of months. If his only problem had been to survive politically, he would have accepted the OKW's point of view and placed himself under the protective umbrella of Hitler and the Germans. His pride, his resentment, his hatred for the Germans and Hitler prevented him from doing so, as did his conviction that the chain of political errors committed by the Führer had already practically condemned Germany to defeat. Similarly, there is no reason to seriously believe that he wanted to wait another couple of months because he was hoping for a crisis in relations between the Western Allies and the USSR or for the "new weapons" that Hitler had told him about. Finally, it seems unlikely that he hoped for a *change of heart* on Hitler's part regarding the war in the east as a result of the unfavorable developments for Germany in the Kursk and Caucasus areas: apart from any other con-

In this regard, the time frame Mussolini allowed himself was so limited that it is difficult to believe he could realistically have harbored such hopes. The fact that on the morning of the 25th, as we shall see, he asked Hidaka for immediate Japanese intervention against Hitler in support of his forthcoming request to cease hostilities against Russia should not be misleading, as this step was part of a different logic. Even if, absurdly, Hitler had immediately entered into new negotiations with Stalin and the latter, after the failure of those of the previous month (and it would be necessary to establish the degree of information Mussolini had about them) and in a military situation more advantageous to him, agreed to negotiate, an agreement would certainly not have been reached in two months (just as in two months the Germans would certainly not have been able to disengage and establish themselves on the famous "eastern wall," which was still to be

politics, disappointments, and setbacks had not prevailed, and to which, in the most difficult circumstances, when he lacked the rational tools to deal with the situation, he sometimes ended up clinging) that he could shift the responsibility for his decision onto Hitler and Germany. An illusion, which, as we have seen, he had already been nurturing for some time and which explains the apparent contradiction between his lucid assessment of Germany's conduct towards Italy and his insistence on soliciting aid that he knew his ally would not give him (and perhaps even pretending to have received firm promises¹ so that he could then accuse him of bad faith), in requesting from the Supreme Command and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs useless *cahiers des doléances* against the Germans, which he knew were destined to be ignored, but which he thought he could use at the right moment as 'supporting evidence' to demonstrate German non-compliance and bad faith, so as to shift all responsibility onto Germany, including that of having, with its short-sightedness, his thirst for power and his selfishness forced him to break away from the alliance, which from the outset he had brutally conceived in terms of his own exclusive plans and interests and, therefore, had not respected and had essentially betrayed, and to exit a war that was now lost. And lost not only by Italy, but also by Germany, and not because of Italy's fault, but because of Hitler's mistakes, fanaticism, lack of political sense, and systematic refusal to listen to his suggestions. In short, in Mussolini's illusion, the two months in question should have served not only to negotiate with the Allies, but also and above all to escape accusations of betrayal and to *save the honor* of Italy and his own.

To this illusion—and with this we conclude—we must add

However, there is almost certainly another, all things considered less unfounded: that Vittorio Emanuele III essentially thought like him, cared as much as he did about Italy's good name and *honor*. Only in this way can we explain the "trust" - for we must speak of trust, but a reasoned trust, based on rational assumptions - that he placed in the sovereign until the end, even though he was well aware of the complexity and shadows of his character, the pressures exerted on him from all sides, the *sore points* of their twenty-year relationship, and the reasons for resentment that they could have triggered in him.

In the *history of a year*, Mussolini would have made these *sore points* and these reasons for resentment the cornerstone of everything and would build

on them the *conspiracy* theory of July 25: the monarchy and its "accomplices" had only one plan: "to bring about, through defeat, the catastrophe of fascism." The king was at the center of the maneuver, since "He had been waiting for the ^{right} opportunity for twenty years." But this would have been only a *retrospective* reconstruction, partly self-justifying, partly dictated by the need, once he had embarked on the path of the Italian Social Republic, to leverage the patriotism of that part of the Italian population that did not identify with Savoy fascism, but also did not agree with the behavior of the sovereign and Badoglio after July 25. More honestly, speaking to Oraziani, he would have said: "What deceived me was the absolute trust I placed in the solidarity of the king, whom I thought would never abandon me." But even this statement cannot be taken literally, just as what he said to Scorza on the night between July 24 and 25 does not shed much more light on the matter. First, during (around midnight, mentioning to him the "underground agreement" which, beneath the apparent fascist orthodoxy, seemed to him to link the interventions of some of the members of the Grand Council itself: "but even if this underground agreement existed, they are mistaken if they believe they can count on the solidarity of the sovereign; the king is a loyal soldier and will never abandon himself to maneuvers of this kind"³) and after the session of the Grand Council, passing by car under the Quirinale to return to Villa Torlonia ("they don't love us in there; but the king is a loyal soldier"⁴). This is especially true when one considers the apparent contradiction between this statement and what he had said to Scorza himself shortly before, leaving Palazzo Venezia, commenting on the vote of the Grand Council: "Everything depends on whether the king will be satisfied with the mere restoration of military powers"

Grandi who, according to him, had "agreed in advance with the circles of the Court" to offer the sovereign a pretext to come out into the open against him.

Among the various accounts of the meeting, Scorza's is the most exhaustive in this regard (except, not surprisingly, for what concerns the expressions of esteem for

"Duce" towards Vittorio Emanuele III and the statement that the latter had confirmed his ^{support} only a few days earlier²), the most exhaustive. According to the secretary of the PNF³, given the turn the session was taking, Mussolini observed that the agenda presented by Grandi, evoking

"the figure and responsibility of the sovereign to the forefront" and inviting him to assume, with effective command of the armed forces, "that supreme decision-making initiative" attributed to him by the Statute, paved the way for "eventuality" that needed to be carefully considered:

First. The King does not accept the invitation contained in this agenda—and his refusal would be entirely logical and justified—and he says to me: "Dear Mr. Mussolini, you have conducted the war thus far in full agreement with the General Staff you have chosen. Only today, because things are going badly, do you want to shift the burden onto my shoulders? Continue on your own until the end." This refusal by the Sovereign—which, I repeat, would be perfectly logical—would lead to serious tension between the Regime, which deliberates—albeit in the form of a deferential appeal and invitation expressed by its highest body, namely the Grand Council—and the Crown, which does not accept.

Second case. The King accepts the invitation, but cannot or does not believe—and this too is perfectly logical—that he can limit his acceptance to the military aspect alone. The King necessarily intends to extend his full responsibility to the political side as well, due to the fact that the two aspects of the war are inextricably linked and fused. I recall that the delegation of powers originated precisely from this necessity, which Mr. Badoglio and the General Staff considered fundamental: that is, the unity of the military and even political conduct of the war.

In this second case—that is, if the King claims full responsibility—the problem of the regime's relationship with the Crown arises in all its complexity. The fundamental aspect of the problem is undoubtedly that the person who bears full responsibility, including political responsibility, for the war, finds himself having to work with a regime—that is, with the totalitarian organization of the nation in both political and economic terms—directed and controlled by those who no longer have political responsibility. This, of course, is if the regime remains in place.

But, more likely, the King could express himself in this way: "So that the lords of the Regime, now that they realize they are in dire straits, remember that there is a Constitution; that in this Constitution there is an Article 5,

that in addition to a Constitution, there is a king. Well, I will take the stage and accept their invitation; but since I hold them responsible for the current situation, I will take advantage of the opportunity to get rid of them all at once. Not to mention that reactionary and anti-fascist circles, elements favorable to the Anglo-Saxons, will undoubtedly exert pressure in this direction.

According to Scorza, at the end of this speech Mussolini said: "Gentlemen, beware! Grandi's agenda could jeopardize the existence of the regime. Gentlemen, have you considered this possibility?"

The first of these two periods also appears in *Storia di un anno* (where, however, it refers to the conclusion of Mussolini's general introduction). Cianetti, in an addition to his memoirs written after reading *Storia di un anno*, denied "in the most formal manner" that Mussolini had uttered these words; However, the denial is not reliable, and it is likely that the former Minister of Corporations was attempting to diminish the value of his vote in favor of Grandi's motion and to explain his subsequent withdrawal. This is all the more so given that the words in question also appear in Grandi's reconstruction of the Grand Council session, which we believe is essential for shedding light on the issue of Mussolini's "trust" in Victor Emmanuel III and, more generally, for understanding his attitude and behavior towards the sovereign, certainly on July 22 and most likely again on July 25. According to this reconstruction at the end of his explanation of the reasons why he rejected Grandi's motion, Mussolini is reported to have said:

It may be that fascism in its early days was different from what it is today; indeed, it certainly was. In twenty years, a revolution has come a long way. But if there is anyone who thinks that today they can dissociate the dictatorship and my person from the fascist regime, that is a very dangerous illusion. Fascism, revolution, the party, dictatorship, and Mussolini are now inseparable. There is no turning back. All bridges have now been burned behind us. Those who are calling for an end to the dictatorship at this moment know that they want the end of fascism and capitulation to the enemy, perhaps under the illusion that the enemy would distinguish between fascism and Italy. But it is not only fascism that Churchill and Roosevelt aim to destroy; it is Italy, because it has become too big and too strong. In a few days, I will be sixty years old, and I could even end this "beautiful adventure" that has been my life. Except that we will win the war. My confidence in the victory of Germany and ours is intact today, as it was at the beginning of the war. I do not intend to reveal to the Grand Council (perhaps I would have done so if the discussion had taken a different course) the important military secrets that the Führer and I do not doubt for a single moment.

victory. The day is near when our enemies will be irrevocably crushed. I hold the key to resolving the war. But I will not tell you what it is. Now, in this situation, it is the end of the regime that is desired. Well, gentlemen, be very careful what you do and the consequences. The Grandi order of the day raises the question of the very existence of the regime. It is not addressed to the government and directly calls into question the Crown, the King. In other words, it demands that I leave. Well, the King may accept the invitation of the Grandi agenda, and then my personal case, the Mussolini case, would arise. I am not willing to have my throat cut (here Mussolini made a gesture as if to cut his throat).

The King, whom I have served faithfully for twenty years, may say to me tomorrow, when I tell him what happened last night (as he will surely ask me): "The war has reached a critical stage. Your people have abandoned you. But the King, who has always been close to you, remains with you." I am sure that this is what the King will say to me. And then what will your position be? Be careful, gentlemen!

Mussolini's mood and behavior during the last meeting of the Grand Council have been the subject of the most diverse and contrasting judgments and interpretations, both by those who participated in the meeting and by his contemporaries, as well as by those who subsequently dealt with July 25 in historical and journalistic circles. There were even those who claimed that Mussolini was "playing it smart," wanting to be outvoted and defeated, because he had already given up inside and believed "that Grandi's agenda opened the way for the only retreat possible in that terrible moment." We will discuss his state of mind and behavior shortly, but the idea that he wanted to "play it smart" and be defeated can be ruled out entirely. Aware as he was of the decisive importance of what was at stake, he fought, on the contrary, with all the means at his disposal, resorting to every expedient, lying, twisting the truth, leveraging any sentiment he thought might elicit reactions favorable to him. In this light, his "trust" in the "loyalty" of the king and the *dilemma* that, nevertheless, he brought to the attention of the members of the Grand Council when, as we have said, he sensed the danger of being defeated.

Dino Grandi, the other true and only protagonist with him at the session, was the only member of the Grand Council who, despite his bitter polemics and his conscious aim to oust the "Duce" from power, did not bring rancor or moral baseness into his battle against him, whatever the latter may have written in *the History of a Year* (so much so that, precisely

In disagreement with what Mussolini had written, Cianetti reportedly emphasized his "disappointment with the party's deviations and the tragic nature of the situation," which had been the basis for his ^{interventions}. He understood the human drama, did not renounce his personal affection for him and, unlike other participants in the session, refrained from making malicious judgments. Instead of lumping everything together, he made an effort, thinking back on those hours, to distinguish between what was sincere and what was instrumental in Mussolini's attitude and in the things he said. Indeed, it was Grandi who, in his 25 *luglio*2, followed Mussolini's speech on *the dilemma* with these observations, which, on the one hand, undoubtedly served to highlight the decisive role he had played in guiding, supporting, and leading to victory a motley crew of individuals, almost all of whom were uncertain, without ideas, in many cases even unable to realize what was happening and the consequences of the situation they would help to determine, in others essentially motivated by their personal grudges and frustrations (never by remorse), on the other hand, they are decisive for us in understanding the value that Mussolini attributed, on the side, , so to speak, of the Grand Council to the discourse on the 'loyalty' of the sovereign and on *the dilemma* that the approval of Grandi's motion could have raised:

Mussolini's words fell into the deepest silence. He had spoken in a deliberately calm tone, without showing irritation or concern, with certainty, confidence, and from above, almost saddened to have to acknowledge the insignificance of the men standing before him,

It is clear that Grandi wanted to use his motion to regain the initiative that Mussolini was taking away from him. It is equally clear, in our opinion, that for Mussolini, the approval of Grandi's motion, in the spirit of its proponent's initiative, had the same value: for both of them, the essential arena for action was not in fact the Grand Council (which, in practice, was for both of them nothing more than a tool for winning a game that would be played not there, that night, at Palazzo Venezia, but the next day at the Quirinale), but the sovereign, on whom the outcome of the clash between the members of the Grand Council ultimately depended. The only real difference was that Grandi, on the Quirinale side, could only give himself the role, as he said, of Pietro Micca, while Mussolini believed he still had cards in his hand that he could count on, certainly if he managed to get the motion rejected. Grandi, perhaps (but in this regard his fears must have been much greater than his hopes), even if it had been approved.

Apparently, as we have already mentioned, Mussolini left the meeting with Victor Emmanuel III on the 22nd "calm and relaxed"; the king, on the other hand, "gloomy and frowning" and had told General Puntoni that, despite having pointed out to him that the only obstacle to "internal recovery" and to "a clear definition of our military situation" - or, in other words, an exit from the conflict - was now established by his presence, the "Duce" had not understood or wanted to understand the meaning of his ^{speech}. Nothing, we repeat, authorizes us to believe that, faced with Mussolini's attitude, the sovereign (to whom Acerbo and De Marsico had expressed their "confidence that he would resume all constitutional power to prevent the final ruin of the country" that same morning) had actually given the go-ahead for the coup d'état, even if it must have seemed to him by then to be the only possible solution, to the point that Acquatone had already informed Ambrosio on the 20th that the king "had finally decided to oust Mussolini." All direct testimony (not to mention indirect testimony) in this regard, including that of Ambrosio and Acquatone before the Commission of Inquiry into the failure to defend Rome is extremely vague and imprecise and gives the clear impression of having only one purpose: to demonstrate that the vote of the Grand Council had no influence on the sovereign's decision to remove Mussolini from power and that Victor Emmanuel III had already made that decision before the supreme organ of fascism met. Apart from what he would have said in October

Badoglio, it is not insignificant that on the evening of July 23, Ambrosio, reporting to the Princess of Piedmont what had happened in Feltre, would not go beyond a generic "we must, now, take some ^{decisions,}" which, of course, could have been suggested to him by the fear that saying more might end up reaching Mussolini or the Germans, but it cannot be ruled out that it was dictated by new information relating precisely to the progress of the previous day's conversation between the king and the "Duce." This, above all, could explain the more nuanced tone and terms used by Acquarone, with which he had meanwhile informed Roatta of the communication he had received from the Minister of the Royal Household: Acquarone had told him that the sovereign had *finally decided* to oust Mussolini, while with Roatta he had spoken only of *the "probability"* of a coup to oust Mussolini."

In light of these elements and what Mussolini wrote in *Storia di un anno*, it is possible to attempt a rough reconstruction of the conversation that took place on the morning of the 22nd at the Quirinale.

After the success of the landing in Sicily, the failure of the Feltre meeting, the bombing of Rome and, more generally, the first partial indications of the failure of the German offensive in Russia (July 12), Vittorio Emanuele III was now convinced of the need for Italy to withdraw from the war as soon as possible. He was also well aware that Mussolini and fascism's continued hold on power not only constituted an obstacle to opening negotiations with London and Washington, but also greatly weakened the possibility of avoiding unconditional surrender and saving the dynasty from national ruin. Hence his awareness of the need for Mussolini to step down or, if he did not agree to do so voluntarily, to oust him with a military coup, which was being urged more and more explicitly not only by the anti-fascist opposition but also by increasingly broad sectors *of the establishment*, monarchist, moderate, and even fascist (typical examples in this regard are Acerbo and De Marsico) and, *first and foremost*, Acquarone and Ambrosio (among his "loyalists," the only ones in whom he placed real trust, but whom he considered—certainly Ambrosio, but essentially also Acquarone lacked the true political personality that he recognized in Mussolini and even in Grandi, whose overly bold and unscrupulous proposals he did not share), but also his lack of inclination, to say the least, for a "political" government that would inevitably have been composed either of those *révenants* for whom he had no esteem or of bland second- and third-rate figures.

plans that were practically unknown to him and that, in fact, would have been chosen by others. Despite this conviction and awareness, deep down Vittorio Emanuele III must still have been plagued by two recurring concerns. From an internal perspective, he feared – as he had confided a few days earlier to Grand Admiral Thaon di Revel – 'taking o r allowing initiatives that would undermine the security of the state', or, in other words, that could benefit anti-fascist o r fascist extremism. more generally, he feared the Germans and how they would react to Mussolini's dismissal and Italy's withdrawal from the war.

Based on the available documentation, it is impossible to determine the manner and clarity with which the king conveyed this to Mussolini. What is certain is that he spoke to him not only with all the sincerity that his devious character a n d innate prudence allowed him, but also with tones of understanding, human sympathy, a n d personal esteem that are difficult not to consider genuine, to the point of making him understand (if not actually assuring him) that he should not fear for his personal future a n d that of his family. It is therefore not credible that Mussolini did not understand o r pretended not to understand. It is more credible that, knowing the king well, the deviousness of his character, the pressures to which he was subject, but also his fears and anxieties, his strong "patriotism" and "sense of honor" both national and dynastic, his aversion a n d distrust of the Anglo-Americans, and, finally, his low opinion of both the political abilities of those who would have to negotiate Italy's exit from the war with them and those of the military who would have to face the German reaction, he played on all these reasons to persuade h i m to grant him the two-month extension that Badoglio would later mention a n d which he absolutely needed in order to first of all appear before the Grand Council with the confidence of the sovereign a n d, once this test had been passed, to try to exit the war "with honor" a n d shift the blame - as has been said - responsibility for the defeat lay with short-sightedness, bad faith, and Germany's "betrayal." It is not easy to say what arguments he used, but we can make some assumptions that go beyond his ostentatious confidence in his ability t o achieve his goals a n d, above all, his belief that he was the only one with a chance of convincing Hitler t o understand the Italian situation a n d, in any case, able to present him *with a dilemma* (the term is symptomatically put into the mouth of Victor Emmanuel III).

by Mussolini in *Storia di un anno*) and thus escape at least the moral consequences of a sudden and negotiated disengagement behind the ally's back, which would inevitably have given the Germans the right to accuse Italy of treason. On the fundamental issue of withdrawal from the war, the main argument—insofar as it proved that he too shared the sovereign's conviction—must certainly have been the authorization he had given, even before Feltre, to Bastianini (and of which, as we have said, the latter had immediately informed the king) to make contact with the Allies and sound out their intentions. As for the internal situation, it is very likely that the strong points on which Mussolini had to rely were, on the one hand, the convening of the Grand Council and, on the other, his intention to proceed with a government reshuffle that would essentially affect the military ministries. After the rumors of crisis within the Fascist leadership group sparked by the mini-pronouncement of July 16 and their multiplication as a result of disappointment, the discouragement and discontent caused by the outcome of the Feltre meeting and, in particular, by the attitude of the 'Duce' during it, the convening of the Grand Council must have been presented by him as the best proof of his confidence in his own *leadership* of fascism and, therefore, of the groundlessness of the rumors that he was finished even in the eyes of most of his followers. If there were cases of crisis even at the top of the party, they were not due to mistrust of him, but were the result of the gravity of the moment and the discouragement and moral annihilation it caused. Everything depended on restoring confidence to those who had lost it: this was precisely the purpose of the Grand Council meeting, which no one could have imposed on him and which he had wanted precisely for this purpose and to put an end to the rumors and hopes of anti-fascism. As for the planned government reshuffle, namely (in addition to replacing the inept Polverelli with De Cicco or Biagio Pace) the appointment of three full-fledged ministers for the military departments (for the Navy, his choice seems to have fallen on Admiral De Courten, for the Air Force on General Sandali!), while for the Army he had not yet found a suitable name or did not consider it appropriate to do so yet or preferred that the king suggest one to him!), with it the 'Duce' had to set himself at least two objectives: a) to play on the sovereign's concerns about the increasingly evident crisis in military organizational structures and the poor coordination between ministries and general staffs in order to "compromise" him and prevent him from continuing to distance himself, as he had been doing for several months, from the regime, since, in-

inevitably, such a significant change in the government structure, which moreover concerned what was traditionally considered a sort of "private sphere" of the monarchy, would be seen by most as an endorsement of his policy; b) to satisfy a demand—that of relinquishing direct control of the military departments and entrusting it to full-time experts—which was very much alive in both military and moderate fascist circles.

Of all these arguments, we believe that the first was the one that had the greatest impact on Victor Emmanuel III at that moment. Hence his decision to give Mussolini time to attempt an "honorable" exit from the conflict and, therefore, to grant him *a two-month extension*. We do not know how convinced he was, since it cannot be ruled out that the king's decision was influenced by the fact that two days earlier, when Acquarone had informed him that the sovereign had finally decided to dismiss Mussolini, Ambrosio had objected that, in the absence of a precise plan, a certain amount of time was needed to prepare and implement it without running the risk of "embarking on an adventure." Nor, for that matter, is it possible to determine whether and to what extent Mussolini, while considering Victor Emmanuel III a sincere patriot and a "loyal soldier," trusted this *extension* or did not consider it above all a "breath of fresh air," which at that moment was precious to him and therefore welcome, because—we repeat once again—it allowed him to present himself to the Grand Council with the seal of approval of someone who still enjoyed the sovereign's trust.

There is a vast amount of literature on the Grand Council session: testimonies from many of the major and minor protagonists (except for a few cases, generally years later) and from those who, in various capacities, had news, confidences, and indiscretions from them or experienced its events and immediate consequences firsthand, a series of *reports* that appeared in the press

foreign¹ and, finally, contemporary journalism, which is generally unreliable². On the other hand, there is virtually no literature of a more strictly historical nature³.

¹ In the early days, the vast majority of the world's press limited itself to reporting the news of Badoglio's appointment and Mussolini's arrest, with very vague references to the Grand Council meeting. These initial reports were followed in the days that followed by others that were more or less fantastical, such as the one that appeared in an American newspaper and was reprinted by several others, including the Turkish newspaper *Istiklâl* on August 14, 1943, which devoted its editorial to it, according to which Mussolini had died when American planes sank a submersible on which he was fleeing.

The first fairly comprehensive reports on the Grand Council meeting appeared in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on August 16, 1943, subsequently published in Italian under the title *25 luglio 1943. L'ultima seduta del Gran Consiglio del Fascismo* (s.l. e d.),

Finally, what was written in those days (or about them, but still "in the heat of the moment" and not "with hindsight") by those who, although they had no direct or indirect involvement in the events of July 25, experienced it, whatever their political beliefs, with a very particular moral involvement that explains why this type of memoir rarely contains details that are completely unfounded (the obvious result of the myriad of 'news' and rumors circulating in those days and which, passing from mouth to mouth, were enriched with new and increasingly imaginative elements) and, at the same time, helps us to understand how the collapse of the internal front² (with all the fears for the future that it aroused in sectors of the bourgeoisie, the clergy and, in

July and his and Roosevelt's reactions to the news of Mussolini's fall from W. CHURCHILL, *The Second World War*, V: *The Narrowing Grip*, I: *The Italian Campaign*, cit., pp. 57 ff. It is worth noting that for the meeting between Vittorio Emanuele III and Mussolini on July 22, Churchill, who could not have known about General Puntoni's diary, which had not yet been published at the time, uses what Mussolini wrote in *Storia in un anno*, but adds: "Mussolini replied, it seems, that he hoped to free Italy from the Axis alliance by September 15" (p. 62). As for Grandi, he describes him as "the main actor in the final drama" (*ibid.*). As for Mussolini, the British *Prime Minister's* overall assessment of him in these pages is very interesting:

Thus ended Mussolini's twenty-one years of dictatorship in Italy, during which he had lifted the Italian people from Bolshevism, into which they could have sunk in 1919, and brought them to a position in Europe that Italy had never had before. A new impetus had been given to national life. The Italian Empire in North Africa was founded. Many important public works in Italy were completed. In 1935, the Duce, with his willpower, had overwhelmed the League of Nations - "fifty nations led by one" - and succeeded in conquering Abyssinia. His regime was undoubtedly too costly for the Italian people, but it is undeniable that, in its heyday, it attracted a huge number of Italians. He was, as I wrote to him on the occasion of the collapse of France, "the legislator of Italy." The alternative to his regime could have been a communist Italy, which would have been a source of dangers and misfortunes of a different nature for the Italian people and Europe. Mussolini's fatal mistake was to declare war on France and Great Britain after Hitler's victories in June 1940. Had he not done so, he could very well have kept Italy in a position of equilibrium, courted and rewarded by both sides, deriving unusual wealth and prosperity from the struggles of other countries. Even when the outcome of the war became clear, Mussolini would have been welcome to the Allies. He had much to offer to shorten the duration of the conflict. He could have chosen with skill and intelligence the most appropriate moment to declare war on Hitler. Instead, he took the wrong path. He never fully understood the strength of England, nor its tenacious qualities of resistance and naval power. Thus he pursued his own ruin. The great roads he built will remain a monument to his personal prestige and his long rule" (p. 66).

¹ Two cases are typical in this regard. o. LIZZADRI (*Il Reggido di Badoglio* cit., pp. 91 and 93) in his diary

In some cases, even the liberal-democratic and Catholic anti-fascist elite), the military and political crisis of July 1943, the fall of Mussolini and the collapse of fascism, the establishment of the Badoglio government and its ill-fated debut under the banner of "the war continues" were experienced by Italians and in particular by what can *broadly* be considered the ruling class. It should be emphasized that, in order to better understand both the general context in which July 25 took place and the course of the Grand Council session itself, even though it expected the liquidation of Mussolini and fascism by the sovereign and, for the most part, hoped for it and considered it unavoidable, it was (despite what many have written and said) taken by surprise by July 25, even among those who can be considered its most morally committed *elites*, who had access to good sources of information. Significant in this regard is what Piero Calamandrei noted in his diary on July 23:

In four days, the Italian military situation has rapidly deteriorated. There is a feeling that we are close to the final crisis, on the brink of disaster... The Italians [in Sicily] are surrendering en masse, the Germans are fleeing towards Messina. It is clear that this is the general collapse of Italy: a bloody Caporetto, which will lead to immediate military collapse wherever the British choose to strike us. Reasoning, it would seem that things cannot continue like this; that the collapse of this dissolving edifice cannot go on any longer. But for twenty years we have seen so many incredible things that we cannot rule out continuing like this for another six months... And the most tragic, most incredible phenomenon is this absolute inertia in the face of this collapse that is overwhelming us. There is a kind of paralysis of fatalism in everyone, from the highest to the humblest. What is Mussolini thinking, what is the king thinking?

This explains why July 25, on the one hand, would have been welcomed as a liberating event, long-awaited, desired, feared, but which, however it was judged, constituted the breaking point of a situation that had become unsustainable, and therefore, for the vast majority of Italians, with joy ("joy overflowing from every part of Italy," as Soffici would acknowledge, even though he personally would not hide the fact that he was going through "terrible days between fury and disgust"²), on the other hand, it would simultaneously arouse in most people a sort of "dark unease"³, disorientation⁴ on the

such as the jubilation at the end of the regime and "the overwhelming euphoria of peace"¹ would initially prevail, but that then, once the moment of euphoria had passed, it would gradually grow in parallel with the resumption of Allied air raids, the multiplication of economic hardships, Badoglio's ambiguous and, in some cases, repressive domestic policy, and, above all, disappointment that Mussolini's removal did not seem to be followed by an exit from the war, while the German military presence was increasing. Thus, immediately after September 8, stimulated by this "dark unease" and disorientation, they would

reactions and behaviors began to manifest themselves that historiography and a culture aimed not at reconstructing and understanding the reality and drama of those months, but at reducing everything to a schematic black-and-white opposition, ended up rendering incomprehensible and aberrant, whereas in fact they were manifestations of a state of mind that—especially among the middle class and intellectuals (and often in circles that had long experienced politics and war itself marginally) - was more widespread than is commonly believed and which, stimulated by a series of cultural, moral, and emotional influences, partly traditional and partly the result of the 'logic of war' and the barbarization of consciences it provoked, had already begun to manifest themselves for some time, in parallel, in general, as the national catastrophe loomed ever larger and a sort of refusal to accept it and come to terms with it took shape at such levels. So much so that, after July 25 and especially September 8, there would be no shortage of people who, disappointed by the behavior of the Badoglio government, the monarchy, and the anti-fascists themselves, would end up, at least initially, to cling to the least credible hypotheses and, in some cases, those least in line with their initial premises, and even to express sympathy for the RSI, hoping that it could constitute a positive development, one of dignity, renewal, and national responsibility. A typical example of this is the case of Cesare Pavese, as revealed by some of his recently published notes: Before the Allied landing in North Africa, the problem at the center of his ethical-political meditations appears to have been how the war was experienced by Italians (and by himself) and, therefore, the "national spirit," with its weak but also strong aspects (revealing in this regard is his rebuttal of the accusation of moral unpreparedness with a curt "but we have been resisting for two years!" and his contempt for the "little men who rush to make peace under the bombs") and the "destiny" of a people of which he seemed to suddenly discover that he too was a part in those circumstances. And, from this perspective, he came to terms with fascism and anti-fascism and gave a more positive assessment of the former (which, above all, seemed to him more in keeping with the "revolutionary" era that Europe was going through) than the latter. Fascism seemed to him

inspired by spontaneous popular sentiment, but to stand firm in defense not of Italy, but of the interests of the dynasty and a privileged class... The war was the war of fascism, not the war of the Italian people. Proclaiming this was not only the truth, but also in Italy's supreme political interest. Instead, military reasons were put forward, coloring as treason an act that could have become purely political. And losing that springboard of popular enthusiasm, which has manifested itself now and still persists (but for how long?), risks compromising any possibility of reversing the tide.

¹ See "La Stampa," August 8, 1990, but also see C. Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere (19~19^0)*,

edited by M. Guglielminetti and L. Nay, Turin 1990, pp. 187 ff.

Well done for raising real issues; he hadn't solved them all and was sinking because he hadn't been revolutionary enough and hadn't been able to free himself from the exploiters. The anti-fascists, on the other hand, not only denied fascism, but also the problems it had set out to solve, and, on the other hand, claimed to know everything and to be able to solve everything, 'but when they argued, they only quarreled'. This led to brooding and politicization ("Now that you have seen more deeply into tragedies, would you still say that you don't understand politics? You have simply felt it inside you now").

- driven by disgust - the *real* interest that is no longer your silly futile chatter but the fate of a people, of which you are a part"), he who had not been ^{a fascist} until then, to the point of wondering if Mussolini was not right after all and concluding: "if only fascism really put an end to the delays and got rid of the exploiters, how could one not follow it?" From these premises, after September 1, Pavese would also cling for a moment to the hope that the RSI could have the function that the Badoglio government ("it starts with Sabotino, it ends with the sitting room," he would write sarcastically) and the anti-fascists did not have in his eyes. "The Verona Manifesto—provided it is sincere—shows the trend that some have been hoping for for years," he noted. No one can deny that, in the face of August's inconclusiveness, it takes responsibility. Provided it is sincere. Why shouldn't it be? We are at a point where we have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Everything." *Provided it is sincere*: these three words are the key to understanding attitudes such as Pavese's and one of the many ways in which the "dark unease" and disorientation that oppressed many in 1942-43 was experienced and, to return to Pavese, his retreat into his literary self when he realized what the Italian Social Republic really was.

However, such a discussion would take up too much space, so we will not go beyond these few brief references, especially since we will have to dwell on it at length in the next volume, when we will focus on the impact of September 8 on the various circles and sectors of the country and on their attitude towards Mussolini's return to the political scene.

Given that, contrary to what is often claimed, the debate, however tense, did not degenerate even in the most dramatic moments and remained at a level that can be defined as high on average, the minutes of the Grand Council session can be reduced to the essentials. In fact, most of the speeches are now of interest almost exclusively in relation to the personal circumstances of their authors. The others—the only ones who were truly important—can easily be divided into two categories: the *protagonists*, Mussolini, Grandi, and, to a lesser extent, Scorza and Farinacci; and the *supporting actors*, Bottai, Ciano, and, if one wishes to be generous, De Marsico, Federzoni, Bastianini, and Alfieri, all supporters of Grandi's motion, to whose approval they contributed not only with their votes but also, without Grandi (and without the help that came unexpectedly from Scorza's lack of political sense and tactical errors), it is difficult to imagine that they would have been successful. For one thing was the arguments with which they supported it, another was the impetus, the passion, the willpower and, above all, the political and dialectical skill, the ruthlessness—as we have already said—with which Grandi presented his motion and the reasons that led him to present it, and drew behind him not only those—and they were very few—who realized what they were doing, but also those—and they were the majority—who had entered the Grand Council without clear ideas, in some cases convinced or resigned to participating in a *ritual* that would unfold, as usual, according to the script that the "Duce" had written for it, who did not realize what was really at stake (during the trip from Ponza to La Maddalena, Mussolini reportedly told Admiral Maugeri that "of all those present, very few understood the importance of the session; Cianetti, Rossoni, and others truly believed that it was a matter of returning command of the armed forces to the king," and in *Storia di un anno (History of a Year)*, he would write: "There was a group of traitors who had already made a deal with the monarchy; a group of accomplices and a group of the unaware, who probably did not realize the gravity of the vote."¹) and that the majority of them left without understanding what their vote had determined, thinking instead of different and much less traumatic outcomes and consequences, always within the framework of fascism, if not believing that they had contributed to the solution desired by Mussolini, because if he had not wanted it, it would have been enough - as Marinelli would say at the Verona trial² -

his "sign" and they would vote for Scorza's agenda instead of Grandi's. This was all the more so because the three agendas in contention, those of Grandi, Farinacci, and Scorza, were quite similar, in some passages even identical, and the differences between them were not very evident, so much so that Cianetti, having read Grandi's and Farinacci's before the start of the session, initially believed that their authors could have "reached an agreement"; during the debate, Suardo proposed merging Grandi's and Scorza's, and others thought that Mussolini, partly because of the numerous votes that Grandi's motion was gathering, would end up accepting the first one after introducing some amendments. Grandi had received, and partly because it was clear that Scorza's motion had not been inspired by him, would end up accepting the former after introducing some amendments.

Compared to Mussolini and Grandi, the only real protagonists of the meeting, Farinacci and Scorza himself played a less important role, but one that still made them *protagonists* regardless of the fact that they presented their own agendas as alternatives to Grandi's and to each other's.

Farinacci's behavior shows a much greater political sense than Scorza's. Both of them basically had some common goals: to downsize and embalm Mussolini, to pave the way for party dictatorship, to exploit the military crisis to liquidate the top brass of the armed forces, and Ambrosio first and foremost, so as to deprive the sovereign of his

"praetorians" and thwart the possibility of a monarchical-military coup. Both, but especially Farinacci, believed that a closer relationship with the Germans was necessary, to the point of making them the only real, effective political and military point of reference. As a political expert, however, Farinacci realized that the chances of his line prevailing were very slim. Hence his avoidance of exposing himself to a resounding defeat and, therefore, his failure to seek support for his agenda, which he almost certainly intended as a sort of personal declaration of principle for future reference, and his criticism of Mussolini for the inadequacy of his dictatorship without, however, weakening his position too much and trying to involve the monarchy as much as possible. This explains why, despite his motion, unlike Scorza's, he invited the "Duce" 'to ask His Majesty the King, to whom the hearts of the entire nation turn in loyalty and trust', 'to assume effective command of all the armed forces and thus demonstrate to the whole world that the entire people are fighting closely under his orders, for the salvation and di-

During the debate, he took a clear stance against Grandi's request for the "immediate restoration of all functions" of the crown, starting with effective command of the armed forces and, *in cauda venenum*, the "supreme decision-making power" attributed to it by the Statute.

as a simple summary of the decisions he had taken); *b*) so that those present could clearly express their opinion on the "basic dilemma: resistance or capitulation" raised by Mussolini at the end of his introduction and to which no one had given a direct answer; *c*) so that the "Duce" could communicate (as, according to him, he had promised to do) the measures that he had decided to take "on the recommendation of the party" to revitalize the regime and national life and confront the enemy, which were essentially the same measures that he had been urging him to take since he had assumed the office of party secretary. That is, according to what Scorza himself wrote, recalling the "most difficult moment" of his speech:

- the appointment of ministers to the War, Navy, Air Force, Foreign Affairs, and Interior Ministries;
 - the appointment of a Minister of Production with extraordinary powers;
 - the regular functioning of the Council of Ministers with full deliberative responsibility;
 - the reform of the Ministry of Culture to adapt propaganda to the changing needs of the nation;
 - the reform of the Supreme Command, not excluding the possibility of re-proposing to the Sovereign the issue of the delegation of military powers;
 - the return of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate to their full function, free from any party pressure, eliminating the interference of ministerial bureaucracy;
 - a profound revision of the Party, not only moral and hierarchical, but also structural.
- The same applies to trade unions, calling directly on members to choose their leaders, and to the legislative field, with a view to greater social justice and closer cooperation between capital and labor.

The impression one gets from reading the available documentation and from what Scorza himself wrote in his *La notte del Gran Consiglio (The Night of the Grand Council)* is that, of these three issues, the one to which the party secretary attached the greatest importance was the last, so much so that when he realized that, contrary to his expectations, Mussolini had no intention of announcing the measures requested of him "by the party," he tried ("as I had set out to do," he would admit twenty-five years later) to force his hand by announcing them himself. This is quite understandable if we consider what his actual political plan must have been, but it is also proof of his inability to assess the political and military situation in realistic terms.

the timing of the Grand Council meeting, the mood of the majority of participants, and even the moment chosen to speak, when Grandi's agenda had already won the majority of votes, even winning over those (Gottardi, Pareschi, even Marinelli) who at the beginning no one had thought would accept it, so that he could count on twenty votes instead of the dozen that Grandi and Bottai had expected. Thus, the result obtained by Scorza with his announcement was a real *debacle* for him: it gave new arguments to the supporters of Grandi's motion Grandi and deeply irritated Mussolini who, after whispering to him once, when he had begun to explain the measures, "I think all this is absolutely superfluous," at a certain point said to him irritably, "move on to something else, because this topic is exhausted," and forced him to end it.

Apart from the fact that there is no evidence that Mussolini really intended to announce a series of measures which, at that point, simply because they were requested "by the party," would have created difficulties for him and of which, moreover, there is no trace of them in his papers relating to the meeting, where, for example, the names of the three military ministers, the chief of staff, and the three chiefs of staff he intended to appoint appear, but not those of the civilian ministers (Foreign Affairs, Interior, Production, and, probably, Popular Culture) whom, according to Scorza, he should also have appointed. the debate had taken such a turn that not only is it easy to understand why the party secretary's initiative irritated Mussolini so much, but it is natural to think that, until that moment the 'Duce' had perhaps still deluded himself into thinking he could regain control, it must have been Scorza's sortie and the immediate reactions to it by Ciano, Grandi, and Bottai that led him to consider the game irretrievably lost.

Introducing the meeting, Mussolini had spoken at length for an hour and a half on a series of specific issues and general considerations that were now largely irrelevant and which he could not help but think would deeply divide the audience: Badoglio's attitude in 1940 regarding the delegation of military powers, the events of the war and the responsibilities of the military command, and the mood of the country. In the concluding part of his speech, he also addressed the central question: "make peace or continue the war"³ Almost as if he wanted to

to arrive there gradually and without expressing an opinion on it ("everything remains in suspense, because his thoughts remain hidden or at least are not precise enough to force those present to take a definite position," Scorza would have observed, never expecting Mussolini to pose such a dilemma, so much so that even years later he would wonder whether he had done so in order to anticipate the "capitolardi" and "channel" with his tactical skill "the moods and tendencies" of the assembly towards the conclusions he had set himself¹). First, he had asked almost *en passant* whether "the will to fight" still existed; then he had said he was ready

to change men, to unite all Italians in defense of their violated homeland. In 1917, some provinces of Veneto were lost, but no one spoke of 'surrendering'. It was proposed to transfer the government to Sicily. Today, if necessary, we would take it to the Po Valley;

and, after stating that this was the moment "to close ranks and take on all responsibilities, even the most serious and unthinkable," he warned:

No Italian, and even less so any fascist, should delude themselves that England is waging war only against the fascist regime and not against the Italian nation. England is waging war on Italy because Italy has made the mistake of growing too much in recent decades and therefore frightening England, which wants to enjoy another century of unchallenged dominance, with five meals a day guaranteed.

Finally, as he tidied up his papers and was about to end his speech, he added in a calm and almost indifferent tone, almost in a whisper, without looking at anyone, but taking everyone by surprise:

After what I have said, I am sure that you will not want to limit the importance of this

to reconstruct it through a difficult critical *collage* of various testimonies, the most important of which (those of Scorza, Grandi, and De Marsico) have only become available relatively recently; the brevity of the space Mussolini devoted to it compared to other issues discussed a n d on which, moreover, the debate focused, while the question of "war or peace?" remained only in the background without anyone—not even Farinacci—addressing it directly and explicitly; the partiality of the testimonies of the participants in the session, all of whom w e r e inevitably inclined t o dwell on and emphasize—consciously o r not, it matters little—other parts of the Duce's speech that were more conducive t o justifying their behavior a n d their vote, or to accrediting a certain image of Mussolini a n d his attitude toward the Italian situation at the time., which they were keen to reaffirm, both to reiterate the validity of their choice of camp and to *protect* the image of the "Duce" - again, it matters little here what kind - that they had formed.

To these reasons, which we might call objective, we must add another that is no less important: the inability to grasp the connection a n d interaction between Mussolini's particular psychological state, his actual political intentions, a n d the *modus operandi* with which he thought he could achieve them and which had led him to convene the Grand Council, t h e fears he harbored—whatever he said—about both the

Vittorio Emanuele III's "loyalty," but rather the possibility that, by taking a more explicit stance, i.e., not limiting himself to asking the question "war or peace?", the Germans, who would certainly have become aware of it, would decide to *resolve* the Italian question themselves.

Almost all those present at the meeting mentioned Mussolini's psychological state. Most emphasized his apparent calm and confidence, the attention and impassivity with which he followed the debate, and his simple, calm, almost distant tone (which, according ^{to Scorza}, made him seem "evident effort to give his thoughts a normal flow, to play down the drama") of his speeches; a tone that became clearer and more decisive, "almost peremptory," only when he touched on the subject of the monarchy and the "loyalty" of the sovereign, but which could not hide the inner tension that showed in the accentuated movement of his hands. Only a few would argue that he was instead tired, overwhelmed and tormented by events, intimately eager to unburden himself. Typical in this sense is what De Marsico wrote about his introductory speech:

He spoke for an hour and a half. His hands were much more animated than usual.
- of those hands of his that can clench into a powerful fist, point like a spear, and

Refined delicacy, convulsive movements—he had made his speech an outlet for suffering, a release from anxiety. In his overwhelming authority as the ruler of fascism, it seemed to me that, against my will, the path to doubt in my heart had opened up: the speech had increased the distance between me - at least - a n d him, but this pain, w h i c h was no longer imperceptible, I thought, brought us closer together.

The person who made the greatest attempt to delve into Mussolini's state of mind and establish a link between his psychological condition and his attitude during the Grand Council meeting was Bottai; first in the heat of the moment, in the days immediately following July 25, with specific reference to the question of "war or peace?"; and then again more than three years later, reflecting on the whole affair.

And Mussolini gets to the point, he wrote in July 1943. Until now, he has spoken with his head bent over his papers, and the lines in the sharp cut of the cold light of the lamp appeared inhuman in a glimpse of Caravaggio-esque violent clarity and dark shadows. A man, a transfiguration of a man, already seen beyond life, in that tenacious effort to fix himself in history that has estranged him from himself and his own, beyond any cordial contact, with the incisive crudeness of the mask. Now, his head rises in the light diffused from above, which envelops us all; the mask falls a n d the face appears, on which I read t h e signs of a will now resigned to the great reckoning. The same provocative a n d mocking voice of the assault; nor does it falter in that Romagna-style hissing 'w' that was always in him, resonating with inner spite, uncontrollable fury, and bursting anger. "Fascism!" he hissed at the height of his polemical fervor: a n d it seemed, already in the pronunciation, that the torment of his creation was beginning. A n d strangely calm, the usual formulaic phrases resound inertly, without conviction. Suddenly human: but, after so much arrogance, his sudden humanity does not move, but disorients.

That voice says: "But now the problem arises. War or peace? Surrender at the discretion of the enemy or resistance to the bitter end?..."
or resistance to the bitter end?..."

Three years later, looking back on the days of July 1943 and wondering why Mussolini, despite knowing of the existence of a qualified opposition in the Grand Council and being aware of Grandi's motion, and having had, therefore, "all the time to meditate on it and weigh up the consequences, which could not escape a 'maneuverer' of his strength," had "let his opponents have their way," had not canceled the convening of the Grand Council, a n d, given the turn the meeting had taken, had not agreed to the proposal to "get rid of them" made to him by some of the most determined opponents of the Grandi group. Bottai put forward a couple of hypotheses which, although they do not exhaust the problem, are worth remembering because they constitute a first significant approximation to its understanding:

Was this force [Mussolini's maneuvering] diminished by his state of health? It has been said so. There has even been talk of a morbid dulling of his intellectual acuity. Certainly, the man was no longer the same: weakened by adversity, drained by his young mistress, tormented by his discordant family, consumed by his ulcer on a Celtic background. He was less quick to react and, from time to time, reacted excessively, leading to inconsistencies, incongruities, and contradictions. But it is a stretch to say that Mussolini was physically "impaired." He was undoubtedly capable of perceiving the significance of the event that was unfolding before his eyes.

So, surrendered to an inevitable fate? It is difficult to understand the psychology of a leader, a man accustomed to living in harsh solitude at the top of a system. There must have been, of course, that too: the agonizing desire that takes hold of you to escape from a suffocating situation, to cut the knot. To face anything, prison, death, anything but this existence in dark, corrosive anxiety, every day.

However, I would not be inclined to explain his entire behavior in terms of despair. On the contrary, I would say it was extreme hope: the hope of suddenly freeing himself from the opposition I mentioned.

Many times he had compared himself to a cat, which, in its apparent hypnosis, watches, ready to pounce. It must have seemed to him, in those days, that his opponents were offering themselves up to his vengeful claws; and he waited.

He waited "too long," and his was a miscalculation. He did not properly assess the momentum needed. He was tempted either to retract the Grand Council's invitation or to "take out" (a phrase typical of his forceful jargon) his opponents during the session, and Galbiati, Scorza, Tringali-Casanova, and Buffarini were there, ready at his beck and call.

He didn't dare? No, it wasn't a question of lack of audacity. He felt "confident," and his confidence depended on the King. He said it clearly: "I have the full confidence of the King, who will not approve your order of the day. And then, what will your situation be, gentlemen?" I can still hear that ironic, bitter, threatening "gentlemen," so typical of Mussolini's polemical manner; I can still hear it hissing from his tight lips, thin over his small, cruel teeth.

In his interpretation of the drama, the sovereign appeared to be on his side; not in the manner of puppets, but in a genuine relationship of human trust. Nor, given the state of his and our knowledge at that time, was this a "mistake." None of us had "secured" the royal consent against him, Mussolini. For us, the King was an unknown quantity, at most a probability; for Mussolini, he was a certainty in his favor in the difficult problem at hand.

This, and nothing else, explains Mussolini's behavior. There is no word or deed from those decisive hours that makes any other explanation plausible. That, in the contrast between his trust and the treacherous behavior of the King, it is the latter who comes out looking worse, may sadden me for the dignity of an institution that, with a higher and more worthy solution, could have been saved for the new history of Italy. But that is how it is: Victor Emmanuel III was more Carignano than Savoy.

It is not true that Mussolini surrendered "to an inevitable fate."

Bottai is right in this regard, that in fact the "Duce" committed himself to...

He pulled out all the stops tactically, but, aware of what was at stake, he chose not to show concern or resort to harsh tones, instead appearing almost detached and confident. This explains why more than one member of the Grand Council, especially those who were less familiar with him, might have thought that he had practically already surrendered and even that, deep down, he wanted to be defeated in order to leave the scene "in the best possible way," betrayed like Caesar by his own creatures. As we shall see later, however, Bottai's judgment can be better clarified: while it is beyond question that Mussolini had not surrendered and did not think he had lost the game because he relied (to speak of certainty is excessive) on the trust and loyalty of Victor Emmanuel III, it is also true that he was aware that if the outcome of the session had been unfavorable and this had led the sovereign (who, moreover, knew very well what pressures he was under and from whom) to change his attitude, it would have been irretrievably over for

. However, it is a fact that after his introductory statements (which should be judged not from the perspective in which they were generally viewed, but taking into account that they were not addressed to the Grandi, Bottai, Ciano, and the few others about whom the "Duce" had no illusions, but to the "swamp" of the Grand Council, which in private largely agreed with him), Mussolini adopted a wait-and-see attitude, impassive to the criticism and accusations levelled at him, limiting himself to "turning, automatically, in the direction of the speakers"¹ and intervening (generally "very mildly" and succinctly) almost only when issues relating to the sovereign were raised by opposition leaders. Even with Grandi, he argued almost only indirectly, avoiding confrontation with him, first, around midnight, when, after seven hours of discussion, Grandi rose up against the proposal to adjourn the session until the following day ("We must leave this room with a decision, even if we have to stay here for a whole week. This is about the fate of the country, and while we are discussing, there are Italian soldiers dying in combat") and then, even when Grandi, faced with the uncertainties of numerous members of the Grand Council and the danger of a reversal of the balance of power that had emerged as a result of the fierce criticism to which the "Duce" had subjected his agenda, and especially the "reference to the Statute" contained therein and his assertion that it could jeopardize the existence of the regime and place him in a delicate personal position, he reacted even more vehemently, accusing him of resorting to moral blackmail. Mussolini did not deviate from this attitude when, as the session progressed, it became clear that, despite his invitation at the end of his first speech to speak and freely express their opinions, everyone, even his most staunch supporters, was willing to discuss and complain about the past and indulge in all sorts of criticism, but no one felt comfortable taking a position on the real issue: 'war or peace?' So everyone skirted around it without addressing it. Most of them because, deep down, they could not resign themselves to the idea that there was nothing more to be done and that the 'Duce' had no solution, and, given the way he had posed the question to them, they were afraid to speak out without knowing what he thought and wanted from them. The others, those who were firmly on Grandi's side, partly because they had been caught off guard by the fact that Mussolini had preempted them in posing the dilemma, and partly because, not having full confidence in Victor Emmanuel III and unable to assess the terms and limits of his confidence in the "Duce," preferred to pursue the path implied

indicated by To.d.g. Grandi and, above all, to put Mussolini in a minority so as to force the king to come out into the open. In short, the same objective, but with the opposite sign, was pursued by Mussolini. For him too, in fact, the real purpose of the meeting was to induce Vittorio Emanuele III to burn his bridges behind him.

A favorable vote by the Grand Council, and possibly his own

His commitment to peace, which arose not from opposition to his policy but in response to the alternative he himself proposed to his members, would in fact have strengthened his position with the sovereign, to whom he could have presented himself as still enjoying the trust of Fascism and its undisputed leader. With his doubts dispelled, the fears that, despite his ostentatious confidence in the "loyalty" of Victor Emmanuel III, plagued him - would have allowed him to try to realize his peace plans.

Hence his introductory speech, a carefully considered speech, partly written in advance, which, although reflecting in more than one respect his state of mind at the time, some of his controversial *idols*, and the need to satisfy the extremist wing of the Grand Council, had been constructed by him with a view to its conclusion: the dilemma of "war or peace?" Hence, again, his "moderate," almost "passive" behavior during most of the session, his silence on the measures that Scorza would have liked him to announce, so as not to give his opponents the opportunity to bog down the discussion on these details and use them to turn the session into a "fascist" trial of more than a decade of his politics. He would certainly have emerged defeated from this, whereas if the alternative "war or peace?" had been the focus, he would have prevailed: despite his charisma being greatly weakened by then, the

The "swamp," and not only the swamp, would certainly have ended up relying once again on his political "magic," rather than on men like Grandi, Bottai, and Ciano, whom he felt were strangers, whom he did not like, or even, as in the case of Ciano, whom he considered largely responsible for bringing fascism and Italy into the situation in which they found themselves. Not to mention, finally, of the king, whom many in the "swamp" distrusted, and of the Germans, towards whom no one knew how to behave, but everyone understood that they would not passively accept Italian "betrayal," and this led them to cling to the idea, to the hope that the "Duce" could devise and wrest from Hitler a *modus vivendi* that others would not have been able to make him accept.

On this line of behavior for most of the session, Mussolini seemed, despite ups and downs, to have the upper hand, so much so that, after the intervention that had forced Grandi to take refuge, as we have seen, accusing him of wanting to blackmail the Grand Council by putting him in

to choose between loyalty to him and loyalty to the country, he must have believed that victory was now within his grasp and, to prevent his opponents from recovering from the blow they had been dealt, he gave Scorza the green light. His intention was for the party secretary to present and explain the 'party' agenda, contrasting it with Grandi's,

"even if the substance of the requests contained therein fully agree with what we have already planned to implement," and "clearly re-propose the... dilemma 'war or peace?', explicitly asking everyone for their own definition in a form that obliges them." Which Scorza did promptly, adding, however, to the three points indicated to him, the announcement of the "party's" measures.

At first, Scorza's speech seemed to have the desired effect.

The game - wrote Grandi² - seems lost. Federzoni, Bottai, and De Marsico, who are in front of me, look at me. This is what their eyes say: It's lost.

Suardo, president of the Senate, immediately stands up. With tears in his eyes, he declares that he is withdrawing his support for Grandi's agenda, which he only gave because he believed that the Duce and the party secretary would accept it. He will abstain from voting.

Cianetti follows, embarrassed and perplexed. "No one can accuse me of disloyalty to the Duce." He proposes a compromise and sees it as possible in a merger between the Scorza and Grandi agendas. The Grand Council must demonstrate unanimity in this grave and difficult hour.

Ciano follows suit. He too does not rule out the possibility of a compromise, in a new text that might be acceptable to the Duce. He advises against referring to the Vatican. "None of those present," he concludes, "intends to raise Mussolini's personal case, but rather to give him the information he needs to assess the situation."

Others mention wanting to speak.

However, thanks mainly to Bottai and Grandi, who managed to shift the discussion from the emotional level on which Mussolini and Scorza had placed it to a rational one, the opponents counterattacked. Tannuccio di Scorza of the measures requested by the party and, according to him, accepted by the "Duce," revealed all his decisive negative political influence and quickly tipped the balance in favor of Grandi. The first to realize this was Mussolini himself, who not only decided to proceed to the vote but, to the astonishment of Scorza and his followers, to put to the vote first not the "party" agenda, which he had accepted "with a weary and bored gesture," but Grandi's, as it had been presented first.

The outcome of the vote was 19 "yes" votes: Acerbo, Albini, Alfieri, Balella, Bastianini, Bignardi, Bottai, Cianetti, Ciano, De Bono, De Marsico, De Stefani, De

How would it react? And the army? The possibility of civil war behind the troops deployed against the enemy? This solution should be discarded, even in the case of a conspiracy, not only because it would be criminal towards the soldiers who are fighting, but above all because it would not solve the central problem, namely how to get the country out of this situation... Everything can be considered important, and perhaps it is; but nothing is as essential as the duty to bring the nation's ship, which is taking on water on many sides, safely into port...

Then, almost reasoning with himself, he added: "A war on two fronts, certainly at first; we must keep in mind Turin, Genoa, Milan, and Bologna, and our workers in Germany..." And again: "There will surely be those who have informed the anti-fascists tonight of what happened in the Grand Council...; at the Quirinale, at least the Princess of Piedmont will be satisfied...; an excellent opportunity for Mr. Badoglio to lengthen his ranks... After that, he too headed for the exit, accompanied by Scorza, to whom, first while waiting for the elevator, then in the car, he made the aforementioned comments about the sovereign, his "loyalty," his intentions ("everything depends on whether... he will be satisfied with the mere restoration of military powers...") after what had happened, and on the willingness of the British to negotiate with him: As well as this other comment, passing under the altar of the homeland: "who knows what the peace of the dead really is; perhaps it is only our desire for peace that we entrust to them to keep safe"²; which, together with what he said to Petacci on the phone immediately after the end of the session ("we have reached the epilogue... the greatest turning point in history... it's all over")³, reveals his true state of mind beneath the mask of indifference and his ostentatious confidence in the "loyalty" of Victor Emmanuel III.

Until the approval of the Grandi Mussolini agenda, he had been able to believe that he still had some chance of keeping Vittorio Emanuele III in check, but now this chance seemed very slim. However, this did not cause him to lose heart and consider the game over. When Bastianini went to Palazzo Venezia on the morning of the 25th, he found him "ostentatiously calm, though visibly worried"; he had not shaved, "and the shadow on his cheeks accentuated the pallor of his face." "But the tone in which he spoke to me," he wrote in his memoirs: "was cordial."

completely devoid of those nuances of bitterness or rigidity that were immediately noticeable when he was about to be severe with the person in front of him. He made no reference to the previous night's meeting. Years later, Federzoni would explain this attitude, this "obstinacy," by referring to the image and psychology of the gambler "too often assisted by luck who, having lost the fortune entrusted to him, did not want to leave the gaming table, hoping to win back what he had lost." Personally, we are convinced that Mussolini's "obstinacy" on July 25 should rather be seen as the refusal of the old fighter to give up the chance to score the final decisive blow before ending his "honorable" career.

In *the Report on July 25*, which is more reliable than *the History of a Year*, Mussolini summarized his morning of July 25 in these terms:

status of the work in progress. We then went to San Lorenzo. In reality, the work was hardly progressing at all. The district had been violently hit. I was surrounded by ordinary people, who told me stories and complained. I had aid distributed. In front of the church of San Lorenzo, groups of Navy cadets improvised a demonstration for me. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. A heavy heat oppressed the spirits of the men and weighed on the city from a motionless sky. I returned to Villa Torlonia. I ate my usual breakfast and spent an hour talking to Rachele in the so-called music room. My wife was more impressed than ever, and her anxiety about something that was supposed to happen had greatly increased.

Various comments and additions can and should be made to this reconstruction. The first concerns the "second thoughts" and "regrets" of some members of the Grand Council who had voted for Grandi's motion. Whatever Scorza said to him, until Mussolini went to Villa Savoia there was only one case of second thoughts, that of ^{Cianetti}. Another, which seems to have been announced to the party secretary, that of Alfieri, did not materialize in any formal act. There is no news of any others.

As for the repeated attempts to contact Grandi, their purpose was not what Mussolini claimed *after the fact*. After the approval of the motion presented by the president of the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, even if he wanted to present the vote of the Grand Council as merely advisory, Mussolini certainly could not ignore its architect. Above all, he could not ignore him in the meeting he would have with the sovereign a few hours later. Hence the real purpose of the meeting he wanted to have with Grandi: to obtain his consent to put his name to Victor Emmanuel III as the political figure best suited at that moment to take over the Foreign Ministry and take charge of the complex operation of Italy's exit from the war, since no one else, not even Bastianini, had so many connections and enjoyed such esteem and consideration in London, and this gave him hope that the British ("the British are realists and do not suffer from ideological complexes," he had said to Scorza a few hours earlier) would be persuaded to overcome their prejudices against negotiating with him. Finally, we cannot underestimate another factor that must have played a part in Mussolini's decision to appoint Grandi as foreign minister: whatever he thought of Grandi, he had to give him credit for two things that were very important to him at that moment: the esteem of Victor Emmanuel III for the president of the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations and the contempt, even hostility, of

their importance for military circles (with whom, as Mussolini well knew, Grandi deliberately had no relations) and for Badoglio in particular.

Two other initiatives taken by Mussolini that same morning should be viewed in the same light. There is no mention of one of them in *Pensieri pontini e sardi*, while the other is referred to at some length, but in an inadequate and reticent manner that distorts its meaning and significance.

Only Scorza mentions the first in *La notte del Gran Consiglio* (*The Night of the Grand Council*); however, certain events in the days leading up to it make it entirely credible. After the bombing of Rome on July 19, Scorza had urged Mussolini to take some conciliatory steps toward the Vatican, suggesting that he make a substantial contribution toward repairing the damage suffered by the church of San Lorenzo and even pay a visit to the pope himself. Although the "Duce" was opposed to the idea, Scorza did not give up, so much so that in the agenda prepared for the Grand Council he included a "reverent" reference to "the Pope's grief for the destruction of so many distinguished monuments dedicated for centuries to the worship of religion and art" and, if Mussolini had not cut it out, he would have liked to add other "openings" towards the Holy See. The matter was also discussed during the session, leading to a clash between Ciano, who, in his capacity as ambassador to the Holy See, had stated that the latter would not welcome such acts of homage at that time, and Scorza, who, on the other hand, had asserted that he knew "from a direct, albeit non-diplomatic, source" that "the Vatican would be pleased." Given these precedents, it is not surprising that on the morning of the 25th, when Scorza went to report to Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini told him that he had reconsidered the matter: he could resume negotiations across the Tiber for his visit to the Pope, provided that both took place in such a way as to avoid misunderstandings: "after [your] visit, you will therefore convene the directorate, explain your actions, and make them the subject of an address to the Fascists, clarifying that everything fits perfectly within the religious policy pursued by the regime." And, after a moment's reflection, he added:

1387, July 25: collapse of the regime and end politics of Mussolini

the Duce begged the Japanese Ambassador to convey to President Tojo that it was his fervent wish that he should support with all his might such a move towards the Führer with a view to bringing about the cessation of hostilities against Russia. In the current situation, it was no longer appropriate to stubbornly think about the possession of Ukraine, which could not represent a complete solution to the Reich's economic and food problems.

The Duce addressed this plea to President Tojo, because he believed that this was the only way the situation could change in favor of the Tripartite.

Otherwise, the conditions under which Italy was waging its war were such that Italy would soon find itself in a position where it would be absolutely impossible to continue hostilities and would be forced to consider a political solution.

In *Storia di un anno* (History of a Year), Mussolini gave an account of his meeting with Hi-daka that was not only untrue but also more sugar-coated than that in *Pensieri pontini e sardi* (*Thoughts from Pontine and Sardinia*), namely that it consisted of "a report on the Feltre conference." (which was absurd, given that the two had already discussed this two days earlier), but this is contradicted by Bastianini's memoirs in which he recalls how, after the meeting with the Japanese ambassador, the "Duce" first repeated to him two or three times "that Berlin had to finally convince itself of the impossibility of fighting without weapons" and that it was necessary to "nail the Germans to their responsibilities," then—before taking his leave to go with Galbiati to San Lorenzo

- ordered him "to prepare the text of the communication to be made in Berlin." This shows that he had not deliberately dramatized the situation with Hidaka, but that, on the contrary, he was now determined to show Victor Emmanuel III what he considered to be the best and most convincing proof of his intention to break away from Germany.

Still on the subject of the account of the events of the morning of July 25, as described by Mussolini in *Pensieri pontini e sardi*, one final clarification is in order. Mussolini's account could give the impression that the audience with the sovereign he had requested was granted without difficulty. In reality, the request for an audience had a more complex history.

The sovereign had been informed of the outcome of the Grand Council meeting at around 7 a.m., when Acquarone had reported to him that the

spring that you will achieve something, and it will be too late to help us. Can we hold out that long? As far as Italy is concerned, time is almost up. We certainly can no longer say, 'Time is on our side' (NAW, War Department, Office of Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, in 'Magic Summary', nos. 492 and 496). It is difficult to say whether it is Bastianini's note, in its essentiality, that makes Mussolini's request more dramatic, or whether Hidaka, in addition to the general report for the Foreign Ministry, sent a second,

against which, on the night immediately following the conclusion of the session, he had met at the home of Mario Zamboni, Grandi's right-hand man, with Grandi himself. After giving a detailed account of the discussion and handing him one of the two copies of his agenda signed by those who had voted for it, he had instructed the Minister of the Royal Household to report his point of view to the sovereign:

In my capacity as president of the legislative assembly, I consider this vote by the Grand Council to be of equal weight and value to a vote cast by the legislative assembly itself. The latter has been placed by the dictatorship in a position where it is materially impossible to fulfill its duties under the Statute. Our aim was to provide the sovereign with a constitutional means of bringing about a government crisis. The Grand Council is, according to a law promulgated and sanctioned by the King, the supreme organ of the regime; it has declared the dictatorship fallen, deprived the dictator of his powers, decided on the restoration of the Constitution, and appealed to the sovereign to make use of all the prerogatives that the Statute attributes to the head of state. The sovereign, in his responsibility and wisdom, will decide. If the sovereign decides to dismiss Mussolini and take command of the constitutional restoration, he will have the entire population and the majority of the fascists themselves around him. Once Mussolini has fallen, the totalitarian regime will fall with him. However, there is not a single hour to lose: we must prevent a possible coup by Mussolini, who would certainly have the help of German bayonets. This coup is probable and possible. The discussion in the Grand Council has revealed that this is the plan and program of Mussolini, Farinacci, Scorza, and the Germans. Mussolini, unexpectedly defeated by the vote of the assembly, will not take long to recover from the surprise, seeking to immobilize, perhaps forever, any action by the sovereign. The next few hours will decide the fate of the nation and the monarchy itself.

This is the domestic situation. As for the military and international situation...

In order to achieve this, we must resolve the issue of war just as quickly, "synchronizing" the King's decision with our request for an armistice from the Allied nations and, at the same time, preparing our armed forces and the nation to resist what will inevitably be the German reaction. I do not believe it is possible that Hitler and his men will accept Italy's exit from the war without a fight. We must therefore prepare to fight the Germans. There is no other possible solution. It is a matter of defending ourselves from what will be inevitable Nazi revenge and, at the same time, rendering the Casablanca decisions on unconditional surrender ineffective. The Allied nations will not be able to continue the war against a country and a people who are already fighting against the common enemy. It is necessary to make immediate and direct contact with the Allies. It is probable, indeed certain, that this will lead to a state of war between Italy and Germany. In this case, Italy, forced to defend itself against German aggression, will automatically

practically find itself, with or without an armistice, on the side of the Allies and in common cause with them. Italy cannot withdraw from the war. Neutrality is an illusion.

Faced with these statements, Acquarone remained vague: he would report to the king, whose "final decisions" he said he was unaware of, even though he believed he had "good reasons" to believe that he would now "march." He then asked Grandi who, in his opinion, could be the future head of government, and when Caviglia's name was mentioned, he immediately replied: "Perhaps Badoglio is better, because he is younger than Caviglia and because he personally hates Mussolini." "The king doesn't like him," he added, "but I think this is the best solution." And, similarly, to the advice to resort to "new men" for the formation of the new government, men of "undisputed authority and prestige," "uncompromised" because they had not held office during the regime and also anti-fascists such as De Gasperi, Cappa, Milani, Paratore, Soleri, Gasparotto, and Rossini, he had replied that for the moment a government of officials was preferable. Then, after Grandi had told him not to aspire to or consider it appropriate to participate in the government and had instead offered to go immediately to Madrid "to make contact with the Allies and discreetly and unofficially prepare the armistice negotiations," they moved on to discuss the measures to be enacted. Grandi had proposed the abolition of the Grand Council, the restoration of the Chamber of Deputies, and the absorption of the Militia into the Army, followed immediately by the abolition of the Special Court and the repeal of racial legislation.

Based on this news, immediately brought to him by Acquarone, in the early hours of the morning Vittorio Emanuele III had finally decided to replace Mussolini with Badoglio. At 9 a.m., the marshal was informed by Ambrosio of the sovereign's decision. However, the date had not yet been definitively set; most thought it would be the following day, when Mussolini would go to the king for the usual audience for the signing; others would have preferred to wait a few more days (hence the hypothesis of July 29) to better prepare the measures to be taken at the same time as the dismissal of the "Duce": measures to deal with a possible fascist reaction and, at the same time, possible disturbances of public order, the arrest of a number of fascist leaders considered most dangerous because of the positions they held, their relations with the Germans, and their personal loyalty to Mussolini.

solini, etc. And finally, what was in a sense the problem of problems and on which there was no agreement: what to do with Mussolini? And this was true both in the event that he resigned himself to the sovereign decision and in the event that he contested it and tried to oppose it.

In this climate of partial uncertainty, at around 11 a.m. (General Puntoni wrote 12:15 p.m. in his diary, evidently confusing the first call with the last), a phone call arrived at the Quirinale in which De Cesare, on behalf of Mussolini, requested a private audience in the afternoon, preferably at 5 p.m. As Puntoni wrote: the request had disrupted "the king's schedule," as he had already decided to act the following day. This led to a series of phone calls between the Quirinale and Villa Savoia, where Vittorio Emanuele III was staying, which delayed the response to the request. Usually, the offices of the Royal Household responded promptly to this kind of request, but that morning they delayed so long that De Cesare had to call back to urge them to respond, once, probably twice. In practice, Puntoni's response (the king would receive the

"duce" at 5 p.m., not as usual at the Quirinale, but at Villa Savoia) had arrived at Palazzo Venezia late in the morning, while Mussolini was in talks with Hidaka and Bastianini.

At this point, the flurry of contacts and arrangements to be implemented in the afternoon had already begun. Acquarone had informed Castellano. In his memoirs, Castellano wrote:

Finally, shortly before noon, Acquarone calls me and tells me that Mussolini has asked to be received by the king. His Majesty will receive him at 5 p.m. at Villa Savoia. "What shall we do?" he asks me. I reply, "What does His Majesty order?"

"Nothing."

"Then we'll decide," I conclude, and I go to Ambrosio's house. He is of the opinion that if Mussolini accepts his fate without rebelling, it is best to let him go, otherwise he should be arrested immediately.

"But that's not possible," I object, "because the king doesn't want anyone near him and we can't know how the interview will go. If we let him out, we won't be able to catch him

In reality, things had unfolded somewhat differently. General Cerica (the new commander-in-chief of the Carabinieri since July 22), for example, in a report written in 1944 for the then Prime Minister I. Bonomi and also sent for information to the Minister of War Casati¹ stated that, when summoned to the Supreme Command at 12 noon, he received from Ambrosio "the order of His Majesty the King to proceed with the arrest of Mussolini when... at the end of the royal audience he would leave Villa Savoia." In fact, the question of the arrest was the real thorn in the side of the whole operation. A series of testimonies, from that of the then Prince of Piedmont to that of General Puntoni and Raffaele Paolucci suggest that

¹ In the same report (a copy of which is kept in *the Puccioni Archive*), Cerica also gives news of the measures he took immediately after his meeting with Ambrosio:

"Since the heavily armed police were under the command of the notorious squadrist Chierici, even the slightest indiscretion not only jeopardized the success of the operation but could also have very serious consequences. I therefore felt compelled to immediately consider the following factors:

- a) the need to assume personal and direct responsibility for the operation, foregoing the hierarchical collaboration of the Carabinieri commanders (colonels and generals) on duty in Rome, including the chief of S.M. and orderly officer included;
- b) the need to have, by 4:30 p.m., the entire force of the Carabinieri present in the city (about 8,000 men) ready for immediate deployment to take possession of, garrison, and protect all sensitive centers and strategic points in the capital (radio stations, telephone and power stations, ministries, banks, etc., etc.);
- c) urgent replacement of the fascist police chief with a reliable, loyal, and technically capable figure;
- d) plan for the transfer of Mussolini, who was under arrest, from Villa Savoia out of public view;
- e) preparation of a suitable location for Mussolini's detention until the day of his transfer to his final place of custody.

From the General Command, where I had immediately gone, I consequently issued the following orders:

- 1) By means of a phonogram, I ordered that at 4 p.m. commanders of all ranks and their troops remain in their respective barracks, using as a pretext my inspection of the armed units and motor transport, which, in perfect working order, were to be presented to me for review in the courtyards.
- 2) I summoned Lieutenant Colonel Frignani, commander of the Internal Group of Rome, an officer known for his intrepid professional ability, and his immediate direct collaborators, Captains Vigneri and Aversa, entrusting them with the actual

It is certain that Vittorio Emanuele III was not only opposed to the arrest *of his guest* inside Villa Savoia, but that he was not in favor of arresting him outside his residence either. In February 1946, responding to a questionnaire for an interview when asked whether Mussolini's arrest "actually implied a protective measure" with the proviso, as was widely claimed, that he could be brought back into political life if the opportunity arose, he wrote: "No one thought of the possibility of reinstating Mussolini, who was arrested to prevent him from disturbing public order." The answer is so vague that it cannot be considered conclusive. The most reliable hypothesis is the one supported in his testimony by Puntoni.

At 4:30 p.m., the general wrote in his diary, while I was walking with the sovereign on the square in front of the villa, Duke Acquarone approached and informed His Majesty that at the last moment General Cerica, commander-in-chief of the Carabinieri, had pointed out the impossibility of arresting Mussolini outside Villa Savoia. Cerica asked to act inside to avoid compromising the operation. The sovereign was irritated and argued quickly and heatedly with Acquarone. He insisted that everything should proceed as planned, but in the end, forced by the imminent arrival of the Duce, he had to bow to the insistence of the Minister of the Royal Household.

However, one point remains unclear, especially since in 1945 Cerica refuted Acquarone's claims and stated, along with Puntoni, that he had only carried out the orders given to him ^{by Ambrosio}; so the most likely hypothesis is that it was the military, Ambrosio and Castellano *in particular*, who wanted the arrest at Villa Savoia, joined after some initial uncertainty by Acquatone who was perhaps initially concerned about the drastic

delivery that had been given—based on orders received "from above"—by Carabinieri Lieutenant Colonel Giovanni Frignani, who directed the operation to capture ^{Mussolini} "dead or alive." It is credible that the sovereign felt a strong human involvement in Mussolini's personal drama (on July 27, the viceroy of Rome, Monsignor Traglia, reportedly told Pietro-marchi that "the king was so affected by the crisis that he could not hold back his tears"). Less credible is that he, like Badoglio, could actually have considered for him—if everything had gone smoothly—a politically risky solution such as "house arrest" at the Rocca delle Caminate. Even taking full account of his formalism, his hypocrisy, and the

It had been decided by high-ranking military officials that he should be killed... and the king wanted to prevent this. The same thesis was also supported by Umberto II, who in 1955 stated in no uncertain terms that his father had not authorized any arrest and that he was aware of a plan - to which he was strongly opposed - to suppress Mussolini, which had been developed within the Supreme Command. So the most likely scenario is that, as Puntoni² has stated several times: the king did not want Mussolini to be arrested, but simply 'detention' of Mussolini and his temporary transfer to a Carabinieri barracks, not only and not so much to prevent him from contacting 'extremist elements of the party' before they had been rendered harmless and to remove him from the wrath of 'rowdy anti-fascists', but to avert the danger of his more or less 'accidental' suppression by the military leadership. From this perspective, the question of whether Mussolini was "detained" inside or outside Villa Savoia loses much of the significance that has been attributed to it and can be explained very well in light of Queen Elena's hostility to the arrest or detention—which in this regard were one and the same—of a "guest." More importantly, if anything, everything suggests that Acquarone, while making *every effort* to obtain his consent to arrest Mussolini inside the villa, as requested by Cerica but above all by Frignani: he was not driven by his personal relationships with the leaders of the Supreme Command, but by the concern that the sovereign's stubbornness on such a secondary issue could either cause the whole operation to fail or provoke a crisis between the sovereign himself and his top military collaborators, which, at that moment, was absolutely to be avoided.

While Villa Savoia, the Quirinale, and Palazzo Vidoni were the scene of this frantic series of contacts (the chiefs of staff of the Navy and Air Force were kept in the dark until 6 p.m., when the Supreme Command was certain of Mussolini's arrest), Senise, who as the new chief of police had to take immediate control...

The Ministry of the Interior was informed shortly after 5 p.m. by ^{Cerical}), and various measures were put in place for his "arrest." Mus-solini, unaware of everything, spent his last hours of freedom, first - as mentioned - visiting with Galbiati the areas of Tiburtino affected by the bombing of July 19, then at Villa Torlonia, preparing for what would be his last meeting with Vittorio Emanuele III.

His intention was to focus on three points. *First*: to convince the sovereign that the vote of the Grand Council "did not bind anyone, given the consultative function of the body itself." To this end, he would bring with him a book containing the law of the Grand Council and Cianetti's letter in which the Minister of Corporations had withdrawn his vote on the agenda. Grandi, and, it seems, "other papers" about which nothing precise is known, except what Mussolini himself would write in *Storia di un anno (History of a Year)*, namely that they were to serve to demonstrate to the king the purely advisory nature of the vote. *Second*: to propose to the king a series of changes at the top of the armed forces, namely the appointment of Roatta as Chief of the General Staff in place of Ambrosio, General Giuseppe De Stefanis, Admiral Raffaele De Courten, and General Umberto Cappa as Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; all this in conjunction with his renunciation of personal control of the three military departments, which were to be headed by General Sorice, Admiral Antonio Legnani, and the president of the Ala Littoria Umberto Klinger: the latter appointment being particularly significant for us because it suggests that Mussolini intended to appease the party by placing a civilian, and moreover an old squadrist, at the head of a military ministry for the first time in twenty years. In 'exchange', it is more than likely that he was prepared not to raise any objections - if, indeed, he was not willing to offer it himself in order to try to avert the danger of a revocation of that too.

the politicians - to the sovereign's expected request to resume all military powers himself; in other words, to revoke (as explicitly requested by Grandi's motion) the 1940 delegation of command of the ^{armed} forces. *Third* (if we accept, as we believe we should, Badoglio's famous testimony): to obtain the king's confirmation of *the extension* to September 15 granted to him three days earlier

Unfortunately, we only have Mussolini's account of the last conversation between Vittorio Emanuele III and Mussolini. General Puntoni's account is too vague, even if it does not substantially contradict that of the "Duce," while the numerous reconstructions, all second- and third-hand, that circulated at the time and afterwards are largely, if not *entirely*, unreliable, to the point that they are not even worth discussing. As for Mussolini's account, it should also be noted that in the "Report on July 25" prefixed to *Pensieri pontini e sardi* (in which nothing is said about it), the only mention of the conversation is not only very brief, but focuses entirely on its formal aspect and on the cordiality shown to him by Vittorio Emanuele III. This aspect of the whole affair - after his arrest and the assurances that the sovereign had given him before concluding the conversation that neither his family nor he had anything to fear, since he had already made arrangements for their protection - must have hurt him deeply, as evidenced by what he said months later to Giovanni Dolfi:

must be considered with extreme caution. Nor, for that matter—as is easy to see—does it offer any truly significant elements.

At five o'clock sharp, - it reads - the car entered through the wide-open gates of the Salaria. There were reinforcements of carabinieri around and inside, but this did not seem unusual. The king, dressed as a marshal, was standing at the door of the villa. Two officers were stationed inside the vestibule. Upon entering the living room, the king, in a state of abnormal agitation, his face distraught, spoke in broken words, saying the following:

"Dear Duce, things are no longer working. Italy is *in ruins*. The army's morale is at rock bottom. The soldiers no longer want to fight. The Alpine troops are singing a song in which they say they no longer want to wage war on Mussolini's behalf. (The king repeated the verses of the song in Piedmontese dialect). The vote of the Grand Council is terrible. Nineteen votes for Grandi's agenda, including four Collars of the Annunciation. You are certainly under no illusions about the Italian people's feelings towards you. Right now, you are the most hated man in Italy. You can no longer count on a single friend. Only one remains, me. That is why I tell you that you need not worry about your personal safety, which I will protect. I believe that the man for the job at this moment is Marshal Badoglio. He will begin by forming a ministry of officials to administer the country a n d continue the war. We will see in six months. All of Rome is already aware of the Grand Council's agenda, a n d everyone is waiting for a change.

Mussolini replied:

"You are making an extremely serious decision. The crisis at this moment means convincing the people that peace is in sight, since the man who declared war is being removed. The blow to the morale of the Army will be serious. If the soldiers, Alpine or not, no longer want to fight for Mussolini, it does not matter, as long as they are willing to fight for you. The crisis will be seen as a triumph for Churchill and Stalin, especially the latter, who is seeing the withdrawal of an opponent who has been fighting him for twenty years. I am aware of the people's hatred. I had no difficulty recognizing it tonight in the Grand Council. You cannot govern f o r so long a n d impose so many sacrifices without provoking resentment, whether fleeting o r lasting. In any case, I wish good luck to the man who will take charge of the situation.

It was exactly 5:20 p.m. when the king accompanied Mussolini to the doorstep of the house. He was livid and looked even smaller, almost shrunken. He shook Mussolini's hand and went back inside.

Ultimately, nothing more can be gleaned from what Renzo Montagna claimed fifteen years later that Mussolini had personally confided to him during the ^{Italian Social} Republic.

The king was waiting for me in a living room on the ground floor. He was pacing nervously back and forth with his hands behind his back, and I immediately understood that he was extremely agitated. I took the documents relating to the Grand Council meeting out of the leather bag I had brought with me and made a move to hand him the one containing Grandi's agenda. He interrupted me mid-gesture: "There's no need; the Grand Council's vote is terrible." "You certainly cannot delude yourself about the mood of the Italian people against you. At this moment, you are the most hated man in Italy: you can count on only one friend, who will always remain by your side: me."

During this conversation, which lasted no more than ten minutes, we remained standing. At the end of this profession of friendship, the King accompanied me to the door and, in bidding me farewell, took my right hand in both of his and shook it at length, thus.

From these accounts by Mussolini, from what can be gleaned from that of Puntoni, who was standing behind one of the doors leading to the living room where the two men had retired to talk, and, finally, from what we know about the farewell between the two from the testimony of De Cesare, who had accompanied the "Duce" to Villa Savoia and had waited for him in the anteroom to return with him to Palazzo Venezia, it can nevertheless be reasonably assumed that the conversation was not dramatic. Mussolini tried to convince the sovereign that the vote of the Grand Council had no constitutional significance. The king did not accept this interpretation and, before he could proceed further and address the other issues that were close to his heart, he confirmed his personal friendship and assured him that he had taken steps to protect him and his family ("I will answer for your safety with my own head," he reportedly said, according to Puntoni). On the other hand, he did not hide from him that he considered the military situation so serious that he could not rely on Germany, whose internal conditions were, he said, "very serious," and that he could not postpone a solution any longer. "I," he said, "must intervene to save the country from unnecessary bloodshed and to try to obtain less inhumane treatment from the enemy." Finally, seasoning it all with a series of "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, but the solution could not be different," he announced that Badoglio would be, and in fact already was, his successor. Mussolini tried to argue, but all in all rather weakly and the king accepted his resignation.

Vrano welcomed Mussolini in the villa's entrance hall and said, "Right now, you are the most hated man in Italy," which is too reminiscent of an almost identical phrase uttered in the Grand Council the night before and which Vittorio Emanuele could hardly

companion to the landing in front of the staircase leading to the villa, where he warmly shook both his ^{hands}!

For Mussolini, the blow was certainly hard, but not entirely unexpected: of the two alternatives he had contemplated, Victor Emmanuel III had opted for the one he had hoped he would reject, but which he secretly feared he would choose. The end of his political power, already considered possible, if not actually anticipated during the night, and which he had tried in vain to avoid until the very last moment, had arrived. Even harder, however, must have been the blow dealt to him by his subsequent arrest.

When Mussolini descended the steps of the villa and walked with De Cesare toward his car (from which his driver, the loyal ^{Boratto}, had been removed under a pretext and then detained), he was approached by Captain Vigneri, who stood at attention and invited him to follow him, saying: "Duce, in the name of His Majesty the King, we ask you to follow us to protect you from possible violence from the crowd."

Mussolini spread his hands, nervously clenched around a small diary, and replied in a tired, almost imploring tone: "But there's no need!"

His appearance, according to the Carabinieri report³, was that of a morally broken man, almost destroyed: he had the complexion of a sick man and seemed even smaller in stature.

"Duce," Vigneri continues, "I have an order to carry out."

"Then follow me," replies Mussolini, and starts to walk toward his car.

But the officer stands in his way:

"No, Duce," he says, "you must come with me in my car."

The former head of government says nothing more and walks towards the ambulance, with Captain Vigneri on his left; De Cesare follows, with Captain Aversa at his side.

In front of the ambulance, Mussolini hesitates for a moment, but Vigneri takes him by the left elbow and helps him get in. He sits in the right-hand seat.

It is exactly 5:30 p.m.

Then De Cesare gets in and sits down opposite his boss. When the non-commissioned officers and agents also get ready to get in, the Duce protests: "The agents too?! No!!"

Vigneri spreads his arms as if to make him understand that there is nothing to be done and, turning decisively to his men, orders: "Come on, guys, hurry up!"

The two captains also get in. There are now ten people in the ambulance, and they are

years and more of war, the merchant navy lost, almost the entire fleet lost, many cities destroyed. They can't help us. There's

close. Police chief Morazzini approaches and, before closing the door from the outside, warns that they will leave through a secondary entrance and that a servant will accompany the vehicle to the exit.

The car moves off, while the truck with the platoon of fifty carabinieri remains stationary. They are no longer needed.

Leaving the villa, the ambulance sped away. "Mussolini always thought that everything was done to protect, as the king had said, his 'personal safety'"¹. He looked dejected, silent, his eyes fixed on the ground². A few minutes before 6:30 p.m., the ambulance stopped in the inner courtyard of the Podgora barracks in Trastevere. Mussolini was taken out of the car and accompanied to the officers' club. De Cesare, after exchanging a few words with Vigneri, began to have his first doubts about the real condition of the 'Duce', so much so that, when it was decided shortly afterwards to transfer Mussolini elsewhere, he was instead taken to Regina Coeli. In fact, Mussolini only stayed at the Podgora barracks for about an hour. His presence there could not have been kept secret for long, and the barracks were unsuitable for 'hosting' the prisoner from a security point of view. Mussolini was therefore once again 'invited' to get into the ambulance and, again citing the usual security measures, transferred to the Carabinieri Officer Cadet Barracks in Via Legnano, where he remained until the evening of July 27, when he was taken by car to Gaeta to be embarked on the corvette Persefone and transferred to one of the Pontine Islands, Ventotene, which at the last moment was replaced by Ponza, where there were only a few political prisoners and the prisoner could be better guarded.

In the new barracks, Mussolini was given the office of the commander of the cadet school, Colonel Tabellini, where, lacking a bed, he would spend the next two nights lying on a sofa
, Colonel Tabellini, where, in the absence of a bed, he would spend the next two nights lying on a sofa.

At 10:30 p.m., the radio announced his "resignation" and broadcast the proclamations of the king and Badoglio, in which the former announced that he had resumed command of the armed forces and the latter that he had assumed, "by order of His Majesty the King and Emperor," 'military government of the country, with full powers' and urging Italians to close ranks around the sovereign; immediately afterwards, in the capital, still largely unaware of what the words 'the war continues' appearing in the second of the two proclamations actually meant, the first demonstrations of popular jubilation at the end of the 'tyranny' began.

no"¹¹ and for "peace." Half an hour later, Colonel Tabellini presented himself to Mussolini in the company of a medical officer, Major Santillo. The latter found him "very pale, fatigued, with a dead look in his eyes, which from time to time became fixed and dejected due to the dilation of his eyelids" and suffering from epigastric pain, but he was not allowed to examine him. Once the two had left, Mussolini dozed off, but at 1:30 a.m. he was awakened by a visit from General Ernesto Perone, who was serving on "special assignments" at the Ministry of War.

The general was the bearer of a letter from ^{Badoglio}, which has been interpreted in various ways:

The undersigned, Head of Government, wishes to inform Your Excellency that what has been done in your regard is solely due to your personal interest, as precise reports have been received from various sources of a serious plot against your person.

Regretting this, he wishes to inform you that he is ready to give orders for your safe escort, with all due respect, to the location you wish to indicate.

Speaking of this, General Carboni, who had shortly before participated in a meeting at the Supreme Command between Acquarone, Badoglio (who "listened and never spoke, looking sideways at Acquarone, as if waiting for a cue or permission to speak"), Ambrosio, Castellano, Valenzano "and a few others," would ^{write} years later:

At a certain hour, before midnight, I was informed of Acquarone's intention to send a letter from Badoglio to Mussolini, and I was asked for my opinion on the text of the document. I read it: it was, in essence, a pitiful and insincere justification for the arrest and a

lines, on behalf of the Government, saying: "since you have arrested him, the leader of fascism could become for us, if nothing else, a bargaining chip, suitable for demonstrating our good faith to the Allies and thus forcing him to end his ruinous war career with a service useful to Italy." No one discussed my proposal, but the demanding wording of the letter was

too important; he had accepted too many honors and too much money, so that anything was possible except the hypothesis of betrayal, which had been prepared and plotted for months, perhaps since the time of his removal from the post of Chief of the General Staff.

However, the fact that this interpretation, which is entirely polemical and clearly *post fac-tum*, cannot be given credence is demonstrated by the fact that Mussolini, although he initially responded rather indignantly to General Ferone, who, based on what Badoglio had written in his letter, had asked him where he would prefer to go, stating that he could not give any indication, since he owned nothing, "neither houses nor villas," so that "wherever he went, he would be a guest who might cause trouble," when the general mentioned the Rocca delle Caminate, he immediately brightened up and , saying that he had not indicated it "only because he considered it not his own, but pertaining to the office he had held , " he hastened to dictate a four-point response¹ which, even taking into account his state of physical and moral prostration, certainly does not authorize us to think that he had realized Badoglio's "treachery":

- i) I would like to thank Marshal Badoglio for the attention he has shown me.
- 2) The only residence I have at my disposal is the Rocca delle Caminate, where I am prepared to move at any time.
- 3) I would like to assure Marshal Badoglio, also in memory of the work we have done together in the past, that not only will I not create any difficulties for him, but I will also offer every possible cooperation.

- 4) I am pleased with the decision to continue the war with our allies, as the honor and interests of the Fatherland demand at this time, and I pray that success will crown the grave task that Marshal Badoglio is undertaking by order and in the name of His Majesty the King, to whom I have been a loyal servant for twenty-one years and remain so. Long live Italy!

Also in *Storia di un anno*¹, Mussolini spoke with contempt of the "private residence charade" staged and carried out with him throughout July 26 and most of July 27, leading him to believe that his departure for Rocca delle Caminate was imminent, so much so that when he was told on the evening of the 27th that the order to leave had arrived, he had no doubts about his destination. Only when he realized that the car was heading south did he realize the deception:

Mussolini asked no questions, convinced that the destination of the night journey was the Rocca delle Caminate. The curtains were drawn, but not the windows; through a crack, Mussolini noticed that the car was passing in front of the Santo Spirito hospital. They were not heading towards the Flaminia, but towards the Appia. At the numerous roadblocks, the carabinieri, warned by the couriers, merely slowed the car down a little. When they reached the entrance to the main road to Albano, Mussolini asked:

- Where are we going?
- "South."
- Not to the Rocca?
- Another order has come.

After Cisterna, the car slowed down. The conversation ceased. The politician, who had been smoking continuously, rolled down the window and called Carabinieri Colonel Pelaghi to find out where they were.

- Near Gaeta, he replied.

- And Gaeta is my new residence? asked Mussolini. Perhaps where Mazzini was exiled? Too much honor.

- It hasn't been decided yet! Polito replied.

When they arrived in Gaeta, which was deserted, a man came towards them waving a light bulb.

The car stopped and a Navy officer said: To the Ciano pier!

Admiral Maugeri was waiting there and accompanied Mussolini to the corvette *Persephone*. Shortly thereafter, the ship weighed anchor. Dawn was already breaking. Mussolini went down to the cabin with the officers who were escorting him. In sight of the island of Ventotene, at daybreak, the corvette stopped. Inspector Polito went down to see if the island was suitable for Mussolini's accommodation. He soon returned and ruled it out. There was a German garrison on the island. The corvette then continued on to the island of Ponza, where, upon entering the harbor, it dropped anchor at 1:00 p.m. on July 28. Polito approached Mussolini and, pointing to a greenish house, half-hidden by large decommissioned fishing boats, said:

That is your temporary residence!

Although he tried to hide his agitation, the words Mussolini addressed to Maugeri at this point clearly convey the irritation and disappointment he felt. This is how the admiral described the ^{scene}:

"Admiral, why this unnecessary harassment? I have been completely isolated since last Sunday, I have not received any news about my family, I am penniless, with only the clothes I am wearing. I have here a letter from Badoglio in which he mentions a serious plot against me." He reads me Badoglio's letter, which is written in an impersonal form: "The Head of Government informs, etc." Mussolini is incredulous about the plot. "I had the assurance of those who could give it to me. They asked me where I wanted to go, they promised me that I could go to Rocca delle Caminate. Yesterday, the colonel commanding the Carabinieri legion, who was very kind, informed me that all the necessary arrangements had been made. I asked if I could go by plane so as not to be seen; I was told no. When I got into the car last night, I was sure we were leaving for Caminate. Despite the curtains being drawn, I saw that we were passing through Santo Spirito, along the Appian Way instead of the Salaria. I asked where we were going, but they were not authorized to tell me. I thought of the fortress of Gaeta; and I thought of Fieramosca and Mazzini, even though I am far less than them. Now they are taking me around the islands, to Ponza, where Zaniboni attempted to take my life and I pardoned him. Why are they doing this to me? I did not do this in 1922. I set Facta free and then made him a senator. I set Bonomi free; I remained friends with Orlando, whom I respect and admire. This is not chivalrous, it is not generous, it is not stylish, it is counterproductive. After all, I worked for Italy for 21 years, twenty-one years. I too have a family, I gave a son to my country. Yet Badoglio worked with me for seventeen years.

That Mussolini might have felt himself the victim of a deception is understandable, unless he realized that he posed a major political problem for Badoglio and his government and that the Rocca delle Caminate solution was politically unfeasible and impracticable. Whatever Badoglio's secret intentions towards him and whatever the feelings of the people of Romagna towards him, there is no question that his transfer, albeit in a regime of semi-freedom, under house arrest, to the Rocca would have meant either handing him over to the Germans or immediately clashing with them, offering them the best and most "honorable" pretext for *military* intervention.

Nor, for that matter, could Mussolini be kept in Rome any longer. Apart from the objective difficulties of keeping secret the place where he was being held, which was frequented by dozens of people who swarmed into the city every day, there were those arising from the interest, curiosity, and human sympathy that several of his guards felt towards him.

Nor, as far as we know, could the charm that his personality continued to exert, despite everything, even on those responsible for his surveillance, be underestimated. A typical case was that of Colonel Chirico, commander of the Carabinieri legion, who, "finding himself in the position of a new Las Casas, had begun to collect the prisoner's impressions and memorable sayings" and had continued to do so despite the reprimands of the commander-in-chief of the Carabinieri and the seizure of the first part of the notes he had written. Given this situation, it is more than understandable that on July 27, when the new government took office and the first council of ministers was held, Senise was tasked with raising with Badoglio the question of Mussolini's transfer to a more suitable and secure location and the type of regime to which the prisoner would be subjected. The choice of location fell on Ventotene or Ponza, while the regime to which he was to be subjected was intended to prevent him from having any form of contact outside the restricted circle of personnel entrusted with his surveillance. In the event of any attempts to free him, this principle was to be adhered to.

"fall alive" into the hands of his liberators. For the rest, being practically but not formally a prisoner, he had to be treated with every consideration.

Already in the very first days of his detention, in Rome, but especially in Ponza and La Maddalena, Mussolini repeatedly stated that he considered his political career to be over and that he was "politically dead." He expressed himself in these terms, to give just two examples, to the marshal of the Carabinieri in Ponza ("my political career is over") and to Admiral Maugeri ("I am politically dead"). Even more drastic remarks appear in *his Pensieri pontini e sardi (Pontine and Sardinian Thoughts)*. On August 14, after a conversation with Inspector General Polito, from whom he had received some news for the first time about the events following his arrest, the state of mind of the Italian people, and the collapse of the Fascist regime, he wrote:

The interview lasted about an hour and a half. Even taking into account the "color" that Public Security officials tend to give to their reports, I came to two conclusions: 1) my system is broken; 2) my downfall is definitive... Blood, the infallible voice of blood, tells me that my star has set forever.

And this conclusion was reiterated the next day, accompanied by a note that was very indicative for us in trying to understand his psychological condition

ca, his state of mind and, therefore, the value to be attributed to his repeated statements¹ :

When a man collapses with his system, the fall is definitive, especially if this man is over sixty years old.

The *Pontine and Sardinian Thoughts* clearly show that, especially during the early period of his imprisonment, Mussolini went through moments of deep despondency and discouragement, from which he would only begin to recover at La Maddalena, so much so that Maugeri had doubts that he did not consider himself "completely 'politically dead', as he had told me during the transfer to ^{Ponza}." During this period, as he wrote to his sister Edvige: he lived in a state of complete isolation and moral prostration, which meant that he did not even feel the weight of the total lack of news he was kept in ("I don't even want the newspapers"), having, perhaps, only one true desire, poignant and nostalgic, to return to live in "his" Romagna. Moreover, especially at the beginning, he seemed not to care about anything, fatalistically accepting what had happened, perhaps even with a sort of sense of liberation and self-humanization. Typical is the note with which the *Pensieri (Thoughts)* opens:

Everything that happened had to happen, because if it wasn't meant to happen, it wouldn't have happened.

This did not prevent him, of course, from reflecting privately and with the few people with whom he had the opportunity to speak on the various stages of his political life and, above all, the most recent events, the war and, in particular, that dramatic 28 June when the 'wheel of fortune' had turned and he had begun to feel anguished by 'a continually growing premonition of the crisis that would overwhelm him'⁶ and to ask himself a series of questions about the nature of this crisis⁷:

Twenty years of work were destroyed in a few hours. I refuse to believe that there are no more fascists in Italy... Fascism was an initiative that interested the world and pointed to new paths. It is impossible that everything has collapsed. When I think back today on the tasks, achievements, work, and hopes of these twenty years, I ask myself: did I perhaps dream it all? Was it all an illusion? Was it all superficial? Was there nothing profound?

And to retrace them, arriving, depending on the prevailing mood, at considerations that sometimes contradict each other. One day pessimistic and ^{resigned}:

the memory of me and my destiny will be erased in a few years and will die out immediately afterwards;

Another day, overwhelmed by his passion for historical comparisons, whereby the Persephone became the Bellerophon and Ponza or La Maddalena became Saint Helena, he wondered "why a much smaller man should not have an equal or ^{similar} destiny" and wrote to his sister: "if not men, time will do me justice and distribute the burden of responsibility." But he revisited them, as Admiral Maugeri soon keenly intuited, with a very particular spirit: even when he seemed most polemical, against the Germans, the unpreparedness and traditionalism of the military, the mistakes made in the education of young people, and the lack of character of Italians ("they have all the other qualities, resilience, sobriety, intelligence: but not character"⁴), he looked at the events he was talking about "like a historian, who distances himself by years, who considers himself a third person and not the main actor in this immense tragedy of the homeland"⁵: without ever really getting heated or, in any case, avoiding direct controversy with the person he was talking to; whether this was because, all things considered, he now felt less strongly about certain issues or because he feared being put in a position where he would have to agree with the objections raised against him is difficult to say, unless we accept the hypothesis put forward by Giudice that for him the real problem was now another: the search for a new image of himself to which he could anchor himself and thus justify himself in his own eyes and those of others. With Mauge-ri, for example, he seemed to get really irritated only once, when, during the trip from Ponza to La Maddalena, the admiral told him that his transfer had been dictated by fears of a German coup to free him and made him understand that in Rome they feared his return to the

political limelight alongside them. Faced with this suspicion, this "insinuation," he immediately rebelled with indignation: